

Jack Johnson Is Committed to Making A Difference

By Pavlina Osta
Special to the Observer

Surfers know singer/song writer Jack Johnson... most of the world does actually. His songs are easy and comfortable; much like my experience interviewing the artist and his tour crew.

At Johnson's concert at the Amway Arena, security escorted me to the VIP room; a little later we all met up in the Village Green area (where the non-profit organizations had tables and Jack Johnson was talking to them up there). For the next 30-minutes I witnessed Jack talk to the people from the surf rider foundation and Filter for good.com and other Village Green Villagers. First and foremost, Jack Johnson is a good listener.

Jack Johnson's "To the Sea" world tour is a lot more than a music tour - it's about being committed to giving back to the community. According to the artist himself, 100% of his 2008 tour profits were used to establish the Johnson Ohana Charitable Foundation (JOCF) to support environmental, art and music education - 100% of the 2010 tour profits of the world tour go to various charities as well!

Here's what recording artist Jack Johnson had to say:

Q. "I watched an interview you had that you talked about growing up in Hawaii and playing the ukulele. When I think of Hawaii and ukulele playing, I think of brother Iz. Was Iz an influence on any of your music while growing up?"

A. "Yeah, He definitely was someone I heard when I was a little older that influenced me - but I heard a lot of other people when I was young; a lot of my dad's friends. In elementary school, I was lucky - that the first instrument I was introduced to was the ukulele. It was one of those things I had in my hands even before I remember playing and Brother Iz was definitely someone we heard growing up."

Q. "When you started playing the guitar, did you think I want to do this for a career? I mean were you pretty focused while growing up?"

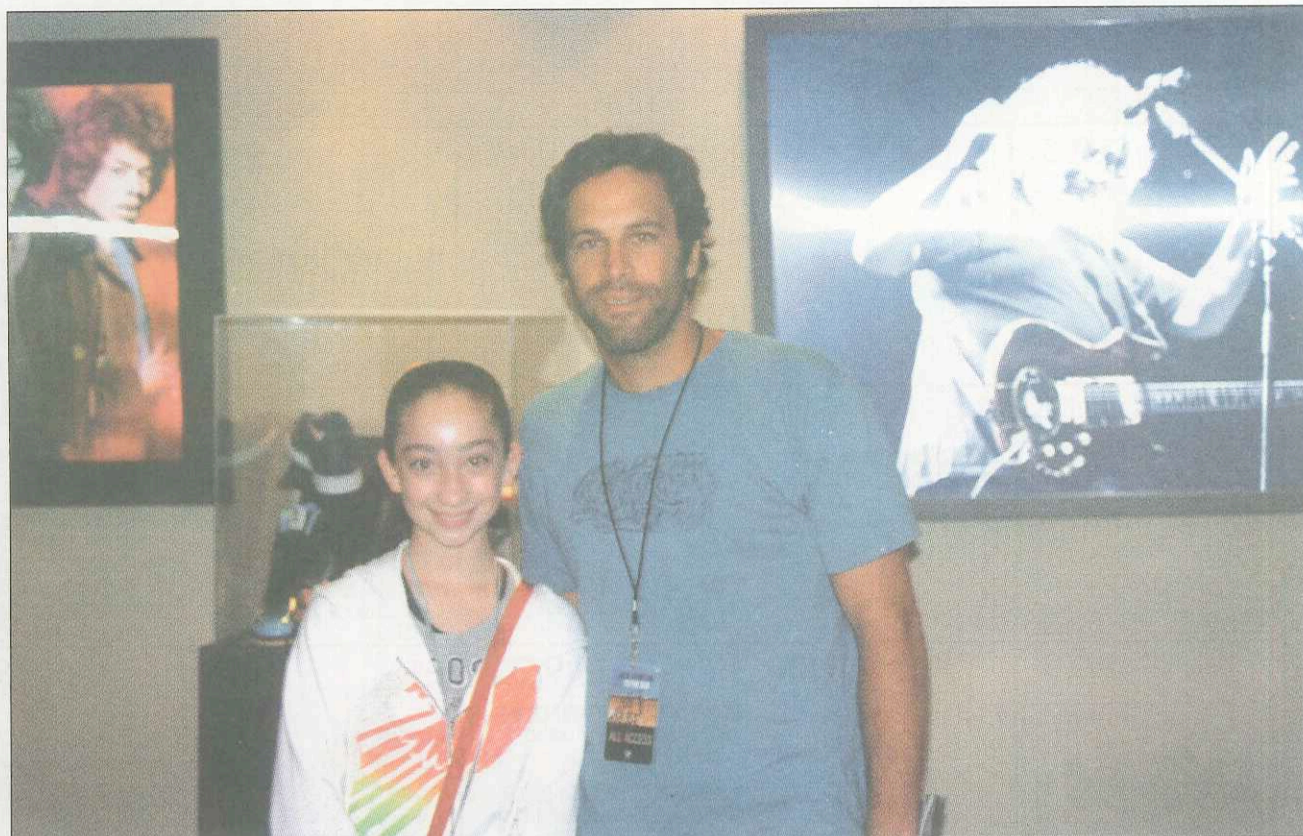
A. "I wasn't really. I kind of learned to play the guitar so the family could do sing-a-longs with Beatles songs, James Taylor, Cat Stevens, stuff like that. Then I went to college and I kind of always kept it as a hobby. Then I started making surf movies and still kept it as a hobby. And then I put it in the background of the surf movies and that kind of led me getting a chance to record the songs because people got the soundtracks to the surf films. But when I was a kid - it wasn't something I thought I'd do for a living."

Q. "One of my Facebook friends, Tyler Sheridan, wanted to ask (because we know your an awesome surfer) what's your favorite place to surf?"

A. "When I was really little, I liked a spot called Au-kai Beach Park and the waves there are kind of smaller and fun. And then when I got to be a teenager and in my twenties, I liked surfing at a spot called Pipeline - that's probably one of the most challenging waves in the world and so that was when I was surfing everyday and a lot of hours everyday and really practicing. Now days, I have three kids so I don't surf the Pipeline anymore - because you really have to stay up with it. And now I like surfing a spot called 'Pupukea' (I think I made a funny face because he said) yeah, I know that's a funny name - and that's where I surf a lot now."

Q. "The environment is very important to you and you donate 100% of your tour profits to support the environment, art and music education. How did you decide to do this? I mean, did you say at the start of 2008 tour and now "To the Sea" world tour, this is what I want to do?"

A. "Yeah, I decided before we went out and did the



2008 tour, that I wanted to find a way that I could be promoting the new CD that we put out, but also trying to give back to a bunch of these non-profit groups. I just thought - they're doing a lot of good things and I know that music is a really good way to bring people together and raise funds for things you believe in. Environmental education is definitely a big one for me and music and art education as well. Things that have given me so much of a chance in my life - the chance to learn and play music and to get into art and also now that I have kids - making sure that this is a planet that's going to be healthy and happy and a place for them to grow up - it's important to me.

Q. "Your 'To the Sea' world tour just started 2 months ago but what have people learned from you?"

A. "Some of the venues we've played at - we ask them to try different things, different ways of putting on a show, sometimes trying to source their energy that their using for the show- to renewable sources like wind or solar power. Some of the venues after we leave find out that the first show we do together that it's worthwhile for them to continue to do and that makes us feel happy - that some places we play are actually changing how they do business and then a lot of the fans when they come to the show- we have refillable water bottle stations so you don't have to buy water bottles - you can bring your own container and make less single-use plastic. So I think when people come they realize that that's a nice way of doing things and they take that back home with them and hopefully apply that in their own life."

Q. "I talked to Matisyhu and he's thinking of doing a kids album. I know you did a sing along and lullabies for the film Curious George - any other plans for kid songs?"

A. "Not yet but I have 3 kids so I'm always writing little songs whether it's about brushing your teeth, taking showers or baths, so I'm sure I'll have all these songs around and record another kids album but there's no plans to do one right now."

Q. "Did you have any obstacles and how did you overcome them?"

A. "I hit my face really bad one time surfing and these are fake teeth in the front and I got about 150 stitches in my forehead and lip and for a while (I was 17 when that happened), I was a little bit worried - a

few months I had to sit out of the water - whether I was going to be able to surf like before just because of the fear of the accident and I just learned to slowly push myself back into a comfortable place I was before the accident. But that was definitely one of those times I wasn't sure I was going to be able to do something I loved to do on the same level. I think just by persevering and continuing to try as best I could - I got to the place I was before."

Q. "I love your song upside down from the Curious George movie and it is definitely my favorite video. And "You and Your Heart" is awesome too! Do you have a favorite song?"

A. "I have one called "Better Together". I think partly because I've had so many people tell me stories about when they've used the song in their lives. A lot of people use it as their first dance song on their wedding day or bringing their kid home the first time. I think because I've heard these stories and that song means more in other peoples lives, it means I like the song even more."

Q. "Plans for the future?"

A. "I always try not to plan too far ahead but in about a week, I'll go home to Hawaii and stay there about a month and then tour in October. And I'll probably take off for a year because I can't write too much while I'm on tour because I have all these people watching and I like to write when I'm not thinking of performing. Instead just writing the song because it's something I want to do...not something that I have to go out, play the song in front of people someday. It makes it hard to write when I think about that. So I'll take a year off from touring and try to write some new songs."

It was great talking to Jack Johnson and his crew was really nice! I headed over to my ballet class at Orlando Ballet and then came back to watch the concert. It was really great! If you get a chance to see Jack Johnson at one of his concerts - you'll really enjoy it. Plus you'll know that you're able to do a lot for the environment too!

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