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Thursday, February 18, 2010

What you're listening to: Jon Svetkey

By Victor D. Infante TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF
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The Loomers Jon Svetkey, singer-songwriter

What's on Svetkey's iPod:

1. "Fire and Water," by Buddy Miller 2. "Raining on Sunday," by Keith Urban 3. "Keep You," by Sugarland 4. "This Time," by Chris Trapper 5. "Woman in Love," by Tom Petty 6. "Up to the Mountain," by Patty Griffin 7. "Maybe," by Allison Kraus 8. "Dear God," by Mountains of Folk 9. "A Change is Gonna Come," by Sam Cooke 10. "Paul McCartney Got it Right," by the Loomers "Paul McCartney got it right," sings Jon Svetkey on the Loomers' new album, "Reeling Down a Road." "There's nothing wrong with singing silly love songs." Of course, if you're one of the many, many people who discovered Svetkey through his solo performances back in the day at Worcester Artist Group, you're listening to the song for its sarcasm, sense of irony and biting wit. And you'll find it, along with the catchy songwriting and straight-ahead pop sensibility that's made Svetkey an enduring presence on the Boston and Worcester music scenes, whether solo, with the Loomers or backing up folk singer-songwriter Don White.

"OK, OK," says Svetkey, "I know it's egomaniacal to listen to your own music, but I just finished up a new recording so I've been listening to endless iterations of mixes since September. And this song is my favorite of the new bunch — it's a gentle poke at my mid-40s self and my inability to connect with the subject matter sung by young artists, wrapped in an homage to one of my (and perhaps everybody's) favorite singer-songwriters of all-time. Plus, my kids sing on it!"

That sense of introspection, personal connection and honoring his influences echoes in Svetkey's list, whether he's discussing his favorite songwriters or his fellow veterans of the late Old Vienna Kaffeehaus in Westboro.

"Patty still owes me lunch," he says of folk musician Patty Griffin, who like Svetkey was once a frequent traveler through the Old Vienna, "but boy is she a fantastic songwriter. And this song, well, let's just say that we should all aspire to this."

Likewise, he has nothing but kind words for his friend Chris Trapper's hit "This Time," saying, "I admit I came to this song a couple years late, but it's easy to see why it was such a hit on the 'August Rush' soundtrack. It's gorgeous."

Of course, Svetkey's not just sitting around listening to his pals, and while having something of a country streak isn't an oddity in a singer-songwriter, it's never been a genre one would immediately associate with

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Svetkey's music. But it comes to the fore when he discusses Keith Urban's "Raining on Sunday."

"I've been listening to a lot of mainstream country in the past couple of years," says Svetkey, "and this song has a great Beatlesque melodic hook and fantastic guitar playing."

That appreciation extends to Buddy Miller's "Fire and Water," of which he says, "I love the way this song builds and builds and builds. The guitar playing is fantastic, the groove is solid and the singing is otherworldly yet down to earth."

Of course, some classics are classic are a reason, and finding Sam Cooke's "A Change is Gonna Come" on Svetkey's list isn't surprising at all.

"I'm on a Sam Cooke jag at the moment," says Svetkey, "and if you introduced yourself to him with this song you probably would be on a Sam Cooke jag, too. For a long, long time."

Guilty pleasures: "I'm not easily embarrassed," says Svetkey, "but regardless of how silly she is, Paula Abdul's 'Straight Up' and 'Cold Hearted' have been on my iPod for years! Ain't nothing but a groove thang. Oh oh oh."

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