

'MR. A-Z' brandishes his wordplay skill

Pop star Jason Mraz stops at the Hult Center as part of a tour to promote his latest album

BY MATT TIFFANY
PULSE COPY EDITOR

When singer-songwriter Jason Mraz stops at the Hult Center Thursday night in the midst of the tour supporting his second studio-released album, "Mr. A-Z," don't expect any rock star theatrics.

"We're the most boring band in rock and roll," Mraz said in a phone interview. But it's not from a lack of interest. After the release of his platinum-selling studio debut, "Waiting for My Rocket to Come," Mraz played in more than 260 shows in a series of headlining and supporting tours throughout 2003, including opening for Bob Dylan, Coldplay and Dave Matthews Band. He followed his merciless tour schedule with the yearlong production of "Mr. A-Z" and his solo acoustic road show, "The Tour of the Curbside Prophets." Despite the success of his two albums and the incessant airplay of his 2002 single, "Remedy (I Won't Worry)," Mraz doesn't consider himself a rock star because he is too busy to enjoy his fame.

In addition to his intensive touring schedule, Mraz said he is also faced with the celebrity responsibility of "signing shit," doing interviews and being confronted by fans.

"I hate fucking camera phones," Mraz said, laughing. "They're the devil and they take really shitty pictures."

Mraz began his career modestly, playing coffee shops in the laid back Ocean Beach neighborhood of San Diego. The Mechanicsville, Va., native realized his manifest destiny in 1999 with his move out west in pursuit of his musical dreams. His up-beat acoustic sets earned him a fervent fan following, and after a few self-released acoustic albums, Mraz was signed to major label Elektra in 2002.

One of Mraz's goals is to incorporate acoustic sets into his shows.

"We're keeping it a good part of the show," he said. "The other night in San Francisco we did an acoustic show to a smaller crowd. I get the best of both worlds."

Known for his ability to rhyme and creatively manipulate words, which he unabashedly promotes in his latest single, "Wordplay," Mraz has become a favorite on the college charts. However, his audience does not influence his writing style.

"If I try to write for an audience, it blocks me. It slows me down," Mraz said. "I

do it for myself, to try and cure my mania, my ups and downs."

Mraz wrote "Wordplay," in part, to grab the dreaded "sophomore-slump" jinx of recording artists by the horns. According to Mraz, the song, underneath its pop velocity, is a piece of satire that beats the critics to the punch with lyrics like, "The sophomore slump is an uphill battle, and someone said it ain't my scene."

The rest of "Mr. A-Z" is pop-rock mixed with bits of folk, country, hip-hop, classical and even a bit of operatic aria on "Mr. Curiosity." Mraz also utilizes the choir from his high school in Mechanicsville on "Song for a Friend," the album's closing piece.

Overall, the lyrics work. Even with the occasional dud, such as when he rhymes "Luna" with "moon-a" in the melodramatic "Bella Luna," Mraz keeps the album peppy and flowing. Perhaps the best song on the album is "Clockwatching," a song about spending time with a lover while wishing that more time was available. Where many pop albums become old and tired after a few listenings, "Mr. A-Z" offers enough variety and, ahem, wordplay to keep it interesting.

Despite his pop-stardom success, Mraz still dreams of returning to his coffee shop roots.

"But that future will be: I own the coffee shop," Mraz said, "and I'll make coffee and biscuits, and vegetarian food for the people

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COURTESY



Thursday
Anthony B with Soul Majestic
WOW Hall
9:30 p.m., \$18 advance, \$20 door
Reggae Music

Friday
Animalcule
Sam Bond's Garage
9:30 p.m., \$5
Jam music

Saturday
"After Life"
DIVA
8 p.m., free
Japanpalooza Film festival



TOP 5 MOVIES

- 1: "Chicken Little"
- 2: "Jarhead"
- 3: "Saw II"
- 4: "The Legend of Zorro"
- 5: "Prime"



NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLERS

- 1: "Predator"
-Patricia Cornwell
- 2: "At First Sight"
-Nicholas Sparks
- 3: "The Camel Club"
-David Baldacci
- 4: "Toxic Bachelors"
-Danielle Steel
- 5: "Knife of Dreams"
-Robert Jordan



ITUNES TOP 5

- 1: "My Humps"
-Black Eyed Peas
- 2: "Gold Digger"
-Kanye West featuring Jamie Foxx
- 3: "Run It!"
-Chris Brown, remix featuring Juelz Santana
- 4: "Dance, Dance"
-Fall Out Boy
- 5: "Jesus Walks"
-Kanye West

In my opinion



KRISTEN GERHARD
WHOLE LOTTA WOMAN

This big screen is seldom silver

I watch a lot of movies. Just this week, I blew at least two days screening old releases on On Demand cable and new releases in the theaters. I am critical, but not picky about the movies I choose to see. I can get into a brainless flick like "Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle" as much as I can appreciate a stirring film like "Hotel Rwanda." But lately, I've been going through a periodic phase of boredom with the norm.

I was simultaneously shaken from and made aware of my ennui last Friday when I caught the new movie "Jarhead," a true story about a Marine and his platoon's experiences leading up to and during Operation Desert Storm. The movie, based on the best-selling 2003 memoir by Anthony Swofford, was artfully crafted and well-performed by a cast led by Jake Gyllenhaal, Peter

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Tristan Prettyman, "Twentythree": The genre of the male singer/songwriter with his acoustic guitar and lyrics on love and loss has found lots of success in recent years, with the likes of John Mayer, Jack Johnson and Jason Mraz exploding onto the music scene. But these boys will have to put up with a new face in town, and this time that face belongs to a woman. Tristan Prettyman joins this formerly "boys-only" club as a fresh-faced, creative singer/songwriter who writes all of her own songs and strums her acoustic guitar on each of the eleven tracks on her CD "Twentythree."

Prettyman, who is currently opening on Mraz's tour that brings them both to Eugene tonight at the Hult Center, hails from the SoCal region, where Mraz also calls home. Her sunny, upbeat yet mellow music is great for a day spent on the beach or just chilling at home. Her smoky voice and love-focused lyrics match well, providing instant pleasure for any listener.

"Twentythree" begins with the sounds of ocean waves crashing onto the shore in her single "Love Love Love." The bubbly and sugary lyrics add to the poppy chords she plays on her guitar. Most of the songs on "Twentythree" are like this, which causes the problem of her songs sounding too similar. This applies especially to "Breathe," which sounds like a slower solo version of "Shy That Way," a duet she sings with Mraz. But there's a positive side to her songs sounding similar. If you like one song, chances are you'll like them all.

Although Prettyman isn't quite as creative (lyrically or musically) as the boys in this acoustic guitar genre, any fan of Mayer, Johnson and especially Mraz will enjoy a listen to "Twentythree."

-Amy Lichty



INSIDE PULSE



Department of Dance,
fall concert



Shopgirl



Soul Caliber III