



"If I have to do a ton on interviews, I dread them, as they drain your psychic energy, but once I've started, it's not that big [a] deal, and often I enjoy talking to someone."

His rise in rock 'n' roll has been steady rather than spectacular, but his sixth album, *100% Fun*, should get him noticed in the street — another by-product of fame.

"To certain people, I'm famous, and others have no idea. If I get in certain places where it's likely I'd be recognised, I get uncomfortable and realise I'd better watch it. Earlier this year, when we were touring back East, I felt I was getting recognised a lot more, but it comes in waves. It depends on how much you're on TV and how much people are seeing you."

So, how would you describe a typical Matthew Sweet fan?

"There isn't a typical fan, although I imagine a lot of college

topped that. Sweet is quick to give credit to producer Brendan O'Brien (Pearl Jam, Stone Temple Pilots, Bob Dylan, Soundgarden, etc.).

"Brendan and I like to work real quickly, and we met each other's match. Making this record, we wanted instant gratification, rather than poring over things forever. We were trying to keep things instrumentally simple, and I wanted to make a clear, strong, real poppy record that was direct like *Girlfriend*, but had the roomy, light feeling of *Altered Beast*."

"I was always jealous of how bands like the Chili Peppers sounded on the radio, and I realised it was something Brendan had worked on. He's one of those people, like George Martin, who can sit down at the mixing console on his own, and within an hour he can make something sound amazing. Originally, I wasn't going to include 'Walk Out' on this record, but Brendan did a great new mix of it, and it's a big favourite with a lot of people and a live favourite. So, he's just a natural and I can see us doing another album."

The title, *100% Fun*, is an ironic dig at those who mistakenly felt *Altered Beast* was an awkward, pessimistic animal.

"The songs that are melancholy on the new record are at least searching for coming to terms with things, whereas before I would present a problem and there's no hope. I've reached more of a blend of anxiety and hope. I liked *100% Fun* as



Sweets for Matthew Sweet

Rising Nebraskan singer-songwriter Matthew Sweet sounded fairly philosophical about the gamut of phone interviews he had to face in the middle of last month.

"That's part of my job, and it messes up a lot of people's schedules if I'm not together about them," he explains from Canada, in the throes of a tour supporting the Tragically Hip (who he has dubbed "the U2 of Canada").

kids like my music, and people who are generally emotionally intelligent get into the lyrics and have a feeling about them relating to their lives. That's quite typical."

Yet, acknowledged and obvious influences like Elvis Costello, Brian Wilson and the Beatles must mean your music appeals to the old timers?

"Yeah, I do meet a lot of people who say: 'Aw, man, it's great. I've been around a long while, and I like the old stuff.' I love that sort of thing — those kind of stray fans are the most interesting to me."

In terms of 90s American pop, Sweet is virtually plowing a lone furrow. Craftsmen with his melodic gifts, lyrical fussiness and integrated, but spontaneous, guitar interplay are very thin on the ground. He's well on the way to deserved recognition, although *Altered Beast* seemed to snag his commercial momentum.

"That was the general impression. When it came out, there was a general expectation on the part of the company and the media that it would be a big commercial record. When it looked to be, that's when it acquired the reputation of being weird and difficult; although, I don't think it's that out there, and I'm meeting a lot of people who are fans of it now. It sold 300,000 in America, and *Girlfriend* was 550,000, and *100% Fun* is already 400,000. So, it's not like *Altered Beast* was a total flop. We didn't know what to expect of the new record, but it sort of jumped out the gate."

With each successive record, Sweet is managing to progress in the refinement and definition of his music, without losing the edge that graces the best rock 'n' roll.

"I hope I'm progressing, as I'm always wondering if I was as good as I'd get. You look at your favourite artists, and they tend to be really great when they're younger, and then they get convoluted and worse. I've always been aware of that, and I've always dreaded it, and no matter how much I dread it, it will seep in somehow."

"I still feel pretty vital and driven, and even in the last few weeks I've been having a lot of ideas for songs. As long as I can stay in touch with that part of me, which is a personal and selfish pleasure to do music, then I'll probably be into doing it on some level."

It sounded like *Altered Beast* was going to be the definitive statement of Sweet's art — even after the excellent *Girlfriend* — but prolonged exposure to *100% Fun* suggests he's even

a title because of the way it interacted with the melancholic side of the record. It made me think of it as a sad kind of title, like how do you find 100 percent fun and how long does it last? And there's the more sarcastic side of the title that fools some people into thinking the record is 100 percent fun. It's a healthy record for me, which translates as seeming more up beat."

A study of Sweet's lyrics suggests that he's on the fringes of Electric Bedsit Land. Are you introspective?

"Yes, when I'm on my own I tend to think of things in heavy ways, and it's through music that I've dealt with those feelings. But people are also surprised by how cheerful and up beat I seem. It's not that I don't know how to have fun or be in a good mood. I think it's important to have a good sense of humour but, on the other hand, I'm realistic, and I fall back into what's it all about and how quickly time's passing by. I get a lot of anxiety just from general living. I tap into my own fears and anxieties and put them into my songs."

So, your personal life is obviously an important component in your songs?

"My personal feelings are, but not my personal life. I've been happily married for almost three years and in a great relationship for six years. Yet, if you were to read my lyrics and listen to my songs, you'd go: 'Wow, this guy's having some problems.' Because I have to bring my songs to life somehow with words, I tend to get into these different relationship plays which are not things I'm necessarily experiencing."

And the divorce from your first wife?

"Long, long gone, and even that was blown out of proportion during the *Girlfriend* time, like how much that album was supposed to be about the divorce. Some of the songs dated to that time, but most of them were done when I was in a really good new relationship."

"I like for people to get their own feelings from my music and relate them to their own lives, rather than figure out what I was going through, as my stuff is more made up, fantastical than that."

Sweet is overdue in these parts, but a "paralysing" fear of flying means he prefers bus tours of North America.

"I like being in overseas countries, it's just the travel I can't handle — but I'll figure it out somehow."

GEORGE KAY

GREG JOHNSON

VINE STREET STORIES



AN ALBUM OF UNIQUE CHARACTER, GREAT SOUND AND SONGS THAT MELT MOUNTAINS.

Includes the new single "Don't Wait Another Day" and earlier singles "Let the Sun Beat Down", a remixed "Winter Song" and "Come On".



IN STORE 21 AUGUST

