

CJ Sorg: A Look Beyond St. Louis

From Nashville, Tennessee, a man of many instruments puts his surroundings into songs.

By Andrew Metcalf

Every once and awhile, we like to listen to music from outside the St. Louis community. Finding a guy like CJ Sorg makes this all the more pleasurable.

With his sophomore effort, titled *You Don't Know Me*, Sorg touches on a vast array of subjects in eleven songs. From hating your boss to loosing a loved one, CJ Sorg's lyrics give every one of his listeners something they can relate to. His words rarely describe events that he hasn't experienced, making each of his songs a genuine window that looks into the life around him. With CJ, it's all straightforward and sincere.

"I was born in Elgin, IL," Sorg said in an online interview. "I'm glad you didn't ask why I was born, because I'm still working on that." His musical career started when his mother "forced" him to learn an instrument. Young CJ wanted to pick up the drum sticks, but his mother preferred the trumpet.

"After about six months of practicing the trumpet I became a virtuoso of the spit valve. I was also getting pretty good at throwing crumpled pieces of paper into tubas during band practice."

At the age of 16, Sorg picked up a 4-track cassette recorder and put it to good

use, toning his skills on the piano, bass, and guitar along the way. After completing three albums, Sorg "went off and did some totally crazy stuff like going to college, getting married, and moving to Los Angeles."

On the first listen, you can tell this guy knows his way around the music business. A graduate from Indiana University's audio technology program, Sorg spent five years in LA working in a recording studio before making his way to Nashville earlier this summer. During all this time, he wrote and produced his first real album, *Circle in Square*. It can be purchased from his website.

Sorg's latest CD opens with the energetic drumbeat intro of *Celebrity*. His vocals on this opening track are perhaps the best of the entire CD. He keeps the notes and words simple, giving listeners the kind of tune that they might love to sing along with in the car.



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CJ Sorg sits with his guitar and its idiotboy logo.

The background harmonies blatantly reveal the influence that the Barenaked Ladies have on his music. Indeed, Ed Robertson should be proud: Sorg does that style just as good as the best. The electric guitar track gives a powerful accompaniment, sometimes hiding subtly behind vocals, but making strong entrances in between verses or before a chorus. Overall, *Celebrity* is a true gem, and perhaps the best song on the album.

Dick Tracy Mask opens with another original drum beat that breaks into an acoustic guitar much like in *Celebrity*. This time, the acoustic showcases a riff that definitely has a John Mayer taste to it. The quick combination of notes in high and low tones almost make it seem like Sorg brought in another guitar every few

CJ Sorg

CD Title: You Don't Know Me

For those who like: Barenaked Ladies, Elvis Costello, John Mayer, Jason Mraz, or California

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seconds to create another layer of music. Sorg puts his piano to good use when he utilizes its chords in the chorus, creating a powerful transition from the verses before.

After yet another percussion intro, *Change Your Mind* goes straight to a guitar track slightly reminiscent of the Grateful Dead's *Friend of the Devil* and very similar to *Told You So* by the Barenaked Ladies. That riff quickly turns into catchy arrangement of chords that sound like a Dr. Pepper commercial.

Sorg breaks away from his acoustic guitar on the ballads *Dear Old Friend* and *Beautiful Girl and An Idiot*. Over plain piano chords, CJ's clever stories in these two make you want to listen to the entire songs just to see how they end. These piano-based compositions lack the sophistication and originality of his other works, but that's appropriate for the subject matter: it's hard to imagine Sorg's lyrics in these tunes over the same guitar he plays in the other nine songs. *Dear Old Friend* also has a feel similar to that in The Beatles' *Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da*.

Alone, a personal reflection on the death of Sorg's mother, has a heartfelt air to it that make it a highlight of the album. Despite the subject matter, it does not diminish completely into a song in a minor key. Like in *Dick Tracy Mask*, he effectively uses the piano behind the other instruments to bring more emotion and depth to the chorus.

Sorg goes to town with the electronic keyboard in the intro to *Sylvan Sound*, then breaks into another pleasant acoustic guitar and piano cord scheme. *Waste in Time* has a harder feel to it, with a distorted guitar behind the acoustic.

Are you interested in writing for *The High Note*?

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