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## My Soundtrack | Jesse Kates of the Sexy Accident

BY J. HOWELL

Special to The Star

What was the first record you ever bought?

I somehow had a bunch of tapes and other things, and then eventually I started buying CDs in high school. I think this CD was the first thing I ever bought. I wonder why this was the case: It was the Color Me Badd maxi-single "I Wanna Sex You Up." Something about it I must've liked, I was probably in seventh grade or eight grade. It was awful and it's embarrassing. I thought about lying.

What's the record you associate with your first love or first relationship?

My first exposure to Tori Amos was through my first serious girlfriend. It was the song "Here in Your Hand," which I think was from "Under the Pink ." I never really became a big Tori Amos fan, but ... I was really trying to get it, she was really into Tori Amos, so I'm going to understand Tori Amos.

Tori Amos is fantastic, don't get me wrong, but it was pretty foreign for me at the time. That and Sarah McLachlan, the record before "Fumbling Towards Ecstasy." I had to really give Tori Amos some time because my girlfriend was really into it.

What was the record that made you think, "I need to do this. I need to make music"?

I was living in Atlanta at the time, and my friends were pretty active in the Atlanta punk scene, and I started going to all these house shows by the time I was a junior or senior in high school. I actually ended up throwing a house show at my house.

There were these bands, one of them was Quadiliacha, a metal/punk band; they toured the country, they were pretty big in terms of that DIY community. Them and my friend Chris had a band he called Point Five. They actually got a Pitchfork review, this was early enough, when Pitchfork was completely unknown and was reviewing everyone who sent them anything.

Basically, I had these friends who were doing it, and that convinced me I should be doing it myself.

What was the record that changed the way you think about arrangements?

I don't know if it was really a change — I didn't become aware of that stuff until later — but I think I've been hugely influenced by the Cars and the Cure in terms of arrangement approaches.

The Cure always had these sort of multiple, melodic guitar lines going on, and I love that, I'm addicted to that, and I haven't really been in a band that's done that, but I love that. They're also really simple; I've been listening to them lately, and I'm surprised by how simple it all is, but it's basically interlocking parts that cycle in different ways, particularly "Disintegration" is the most obvious example of that.

The Cars, you know, they're very reductive in their approach. I feel like those arrangements are almost what make those songs work because a lot of them, especially the early ones, they have good anthemic choruses, but some of those songs that were hits, if you just look at them on the surface, I don't think they would be hits today.

The lyrics aren't straight pop enough for big time radio like they were then somehow. If you change those arrangements, the songs fall apart. Ric Ocasek clearly didn't have a virtuosic voice, but somehow the arrangements made those songs work. I feel that's what that band was, perfect arrangements.

Guilty pleasure record?

Pop in general people would consider a guilty pleasure, right? I really, really loved "Manic Monday" by the Bangles. Now is that a guilty pleasure? I don't know. I think it's a genius song, written by Prince. I love that song. I went through an obsession with that song about a month ago.

I'm pretty inclusive in what I think is OK. I don't have any, like, Justin Bieber or anything; maybe I should. Maybe I should check it out. Obviously people like it for a reason.

What album would you most like to have been a fly on the wall during the recording of?

This is so cliché, but I think it's the truth, it would probably be "Pet Sounds" by the Beach Boys. Because the sounds they were getting were so unusual that to see how you would achieve something like that with three tracks, seeing a bassoon player and an upright bass player and a viola playing in unison to get a certain timbre would've been interesting.

Other than that, it would probably be a bunch of the Motown recordings. Just seeing the Funk Brothers play live would've been mind-blowing. Now, I've seen "Standing in the Shadows of Motown," but Jamerson's dead, seeing James Jamerson lay down that (music) ... that actually to me would be the thing I'd most want to see. Anything with him playing on it. Any of those Motown recordings.

People maybe don't know who he is, but turn up the bass in your car listening, those Motown recordings, the bass carries the song. The bass IS the song. It's not the kind of thing a casual listener would realize, but I did this for my wife, and she was like, "holy crap, you're right," if you pull the bass down, the song doesn't work anymore. That box set "Hitsville USA" is so amazing. The remasters don't sound overly hyped or anything.

Record that makes you question your choice of instrument?

I'm a sucker for a good drummer. Most of the decisions involved in the way my band records revolve around trying to get the drums to sound good. We only go for producers and engineers who have demonstrated that they can get a great drum sound. To me it's the most important thing.

My favorite drummer was Simon Smith from the Wedding Present, him or Boris Williams from the Cure, actually. Basically Simon from the Wedding Present on the "Sea Monsters" record, engineered by Steve Albini, the best drum sound engineer ever, at Pachyderm studios, the best drum room ever. An incredibly good drummer playing on an aggressive pop record. ...

Many times I've thought, "Why didn't I learn to play drums?" I still think about learning to play drums, because you're always in demand as a drummer.