

SAVE THE DATE

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Melodious **JASON LUCKETT**
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CROSSING ARIZONA
THE ULTIMATE SUMMER
ENTERTAINMENT CALENDAR

RECOGNIZE!

Why Urban Stars Shine,
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Is the Man Among Men



SAVE THE DATE

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Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson and Sarah Michelle Gellar star in *Southland Tales* (due out later this year). Photo courtesy of iStockphoto.com



SAVE THE DATE

ENTERTAINMENT

The Music of Jason Lockett

INSIDE:
The Music of Jason Lockett
Mathew and DeVivo's Disturbing Adventure
Love and Laughter from Danny Hizami
The Pride of Ron Oda


68 Degrees and Clear

The Bliss of Jason Lockett

Written by YAYOI LENA WINFREY
Photography by JOHANNA GUERIN

"At this stage of the game, I'm happy. I'm making an album every few years, touring, doing a bit more film composing, and living a slightly less transient life."





With the kind of smile that could light up the sky like the Fourth of July, Jason Lockett cheerfully greets me at a local coffee shop. Perhaps his outward expression of joy is attributable to an inner serenity (*zen*, if you will) because he seems to beam at anyone who looks in his direction.

Besides doing exactly what he loves—that is, making music—Lockett is blissfully at peace with himself, his past, present, and future. Today, he will drink a cup of java, eat an apple pinwheel pastry, and reveal to me the secrets of his contentment.

Born in Honolulu, Lockett moved to Los Angeles a year later. When he was eight, his family relocated to Irvine where he grew up alongside his younger sister, Josslyn.

Both of his parents hailed from Mississippi, joined the military and ended up earning masters degrees at the University of Hawaii. They met during an internship at a mental institution in the 1960s.

“One was a patient,” Lockett jokes. “They did not reveal which one.”

Although they shared much in common, one thing was uniquely different about Lockett's parents. His father, who died in 1999, was black. His mother, white.

Lockett's father was a psychologist. His mother, a clinical social worker then, is now the minister of a New Hampshire church.

Although Lockett says his music reflects his biracial heritage, it did so more in the past. Clearly, time has provided him with a greater understanding of his racial roots. In his repertoire today, there is no sentiment for the so-called “tragic mulatto.” Instead, Lockett views his racial duality as a positive experience.

“I always thought of it as the biracial *opportunity*,” he explains. “You can always look at it as you're accepted on *both* sides.”

The average stranger scanning Lockett's tawny skin and dark eyes will assume he's Brazilian, he says. That's probably because so many Brazilians are *mestizo*—a mixture of the descendants of African slaves, indigenous locals and Portuguese colonizers. But more often than not, says Lockett, most people identify him as being African American, although his family, like so many other African American families, descended from European and Native American bloodlines. In Lockett's case, his paternal great-grandfather was Creek Indian, and there's French blood in his family, too.

With the population of biracial Americans growing daily, Lockett feels fortunate that discussions about his mixed race is topical.

“It's great that we can talk about it (now) that we have a voice that has a volume,” he says.

Lockett's fans would agree, and they often talk about it with him after watching his onstage performances.

Just vain enough to not reveal his true age (he'll admit to 30ish), yet humble enough to not brag about his good looks, Lockett is all Boho/hippie/rasta with his flowing mane of thick wavy hair. That, and his sky-illuminating signature smile are the quintessential features that shape his persona, both on and off stage.

But Lockett wasn't always so happy, especially after realizing his father's torment over being the only black face in a sea of white in their all-Caucasian neighborhood. Growing up in their predominantly white Irvine community was also a trying experience for Lockett and his sister.

“We were definitely aware of everything,” he explains. “(It was) kind of a weird bubble.”

Even though Lockett says his mother had many black women friends, he remembers, "What was black to me was my dad. He was the sole representation of black culture. That, and TV."

Lockett's father attempted to educate his children about black history, and often brought home books by and about Frederick Douglass.

"A lot of (my father's lectures) went in one ear and out the other," confesses Lockett who preferred listening to the blues to learn about African Americans.

Ironically, he first discovered the blues through the Rolling Stones.

Although he embraced his black side, Lockett was, nevertheless, perplexed by the mixed messages he received from his father.

"My dad's (black pride) rhetoric was fairly ritualistic," notes Lockett, "but in reality, he married a white woman, (then later) a Filipina."

"It was confusing in its own way," he adds.

Being a well-respected professional with credibility, status and material success apparently wasn't enough to quell the elder Lockett's insecurities. Lockett says that his father was compelled to prove that blacks were as capable as whites.

"My dad," he laments, "...really felt the burden of representation."

Lockett was painfully conscious of his father's need to advocate for his race and understood his paradoxical discomfort at doing so.

"He brought us to this white...very homogenous environment, and had to show the best of black people," he says.

His father also mentored black university students in his field. Lockett recalls that he was always well dressed and often wore a suit.

"In a way, I would've been happy to see my dad just put on a t-shirt," he bemoans, then clarifies, "What drove him to an early grave was his looking for acceptance. It was hard to watch."

But Lockett also calls his father, "a sweet man" who was "funny, playful" and "the cool dad" who danced with all the kids at a party.

The effects of racism, however, continued to haunt his father in spite of his professional achievements, and he was always on the defensive.

"He's a guy that did not take (stuff)," says Lockett, "but he also perceived (stuff) in the dropping of a napkin."

According to Lockett, there was always music playing in their house, especially jazz. He grew up listening to his father's records including music imported from Brazil that featured the intoxicating rhythms of bossa nova. Stan Getz and Astrid Gilberto were favorites, and both Lockett and his father listened to Nina Simone and Oscar Brown, Jr. too.

"We had a lot of thinking man's music," he chuckles.

When he was only a month old, Lockett was propped up against a pile of LP's by his father who then snapped a photograph of him. Evidently, his dad knew innately that his son would grow up to be a musician. But, even as Lockett's father nurtured his son's musical ambitions, he urged him to earn a law degree.

"They were supportive," Lockett says about his parents, "(and) made sure I was able to keep pursuing the music. They would want me to do other things to fall back on, (but) they encouraged (my music)."

Lockett says his mother drove him to his gigs, and both parents were "always enabling the dream."

Still, he received a Communication Studies degree at UCLA, just in case.

When he was 24, Lockett traveled to Mississippi to connect with his father's family from whom his dad had become estranged.

"I do a song, *Crazy Curly Head*, about going to Mississippi the first time as an adult," Lockett reflects.

He was tickled to meet his uncle sporting a straw hat.

"(My dad's) brother was very country," laughs Lockett.

But his sophisticated father had a down home side, too, and loved playing practical jokes. Lockett says he once pulled something he refers to as "a

Brady Bunch moment".

Mimicking his father yelling up the stairs, Lockett shouts, 'Hey, kids! There's someone here to see you.'

Waiting downstairs was Stevie Wonder.

Unbeknownst to the family, Lockett's father had met a woman who worked at Wonder's radio station, KJLH, and suggested that a "Dr. Phil" type show be developed around him—before Dr. Phil's existed.

That Lockett's father had a profound influence on his son's life is apparent (Lockett talks about him constantly), but it was the blend of his musical tastes that inspired his son to develop his own eclectic sounds.

Besides playing the guitar, Lockett is also proficient on bass, keyboards and harmonica.

"I'm not a good drummer (although) I wish I was," he confesses. "I just have a pretty good musical mind."

Gifted with what he calls "a good ear", Lockett admits that being naturally talented interfered with training discipline. While he was taking piano lessons, his mother played notes that he was able to replicate without reading. Although he still plays mostly by ear, Lockett is proud of his ability to read music as well.

With the release of five CDs over the past decade (*J Masala Griot*, 1993; *Suicide, or Celebration?*, 1996; *Distil*, 1997; *Living Room*, 2000; *arrogance, procrastination, fear, humility*, 2005), Lockett is plainly a prolific artist. His philosophical songs, all self-written, are lyrically rich and conjure up marvelous imagery. On his latest CD, titled songs range from those proclaiming or longing for personal love to seriously pensive tunes like ...*children* about the U.S. "shock and awe" retaliatory campaign against Iraq. When Lockett sings, "We are missing 6,000 children" and how his "heart is breaking to hear the truth," there's no confounding his sensitivity to, and concern about, humanity.

Although his latest CD has more of an





mystery & wonder
a collection of quiet & loud
magic trumps reason
+ groovy acoustic soul

JASON
LUCKETT

Good Day in L.A.

sugar on caffeine
snow caps the mountains
the sun rises warm by the sea

i hear from a friend
while she sleeps in my bed
then waits while i talk to steve

one of the boys from the high school
calls to say he's doing alright
and this painter i met is blowing up my phone

it's a good day in LA
68 and clear
a good day for a ride to the ocean
(and) the sun is so sincere

.....
tonight the world stage is filled with love
friends and i listen to ruth
then i take the stage with bili and ace
can't imagine how people can hate

we play with a history
we laugh through the pain that has given us
the strength to love
and grandma claps from her big chair in heaven

it's a good day in LA
68 and clear
a good day for a ride to the ocean
(and) the sun is so sincere

.....
when i think of all the flak we get,
it's just because we're admired
i say "check out.
you can leave at will.
i'll take sunshine."

.....
it's hard to keep up with all of this beauty
and still keep your sanity
yet never disturb another man's peace
sometimes i fail this decree

some days it rains
some days it's brown
some days all are green

and hummingbirds hover here
looking for sweet

it's a good day in LA
68 and clear
a good day for a ride to the ocean
(and) the sun is so sincere

Jason Lockett, © Lucky Masala Head

electric flavor, in the mid-1990s Lockett was into what he calls "acoustic groovy soul."

"Kind of in the tradition like early Bill Withers, Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, Curtis Mayfield, and Richie Havens," he explains. "All the stuff I was into as a kid."

He continues, adding to the list of his musical influences, "The Beatles, of course. The Smiths, Elvis Costello, and Morrissey."

Lockett was also moved by the 1980s punk rock group, The Clash, and by the politically active Billy Bragg. "He played electric guitar and was really loud, brash, funny, and a socialist, and I dug him a lot," says Lockett. "He got me to believe I could do what I do."

Lockett discloses that he still listens to a lot of Beatles and is looking forward to purchasing the new Red Hot Chili Peppers' album. He also admits to a fondness for Paul Simon, David Gray and Nick Drake, a British folksinger who died in 1974.

Currently recording several new tunes, Lockett says his next CD, *Mystery & Wonder*, will exhibit his passion for intimacy, as well as suggest the style of Getz and Gilberto.

"There's definitely a lot of drum machine type stuff, but it's really very warm and organic sounding," he reveals. "It has everything but the girl."

Confessing that he's a hopeless romantic, Lockett says his musical goal is to convey the feeling of "the intimacy of it all" by being as "honest and as stripped down in the shell" as possible.

Recently, Lockett found a new way to express his music—through film scoring.

A short feature, *PNOK (Primary Next of Kin)*, stars Danny Glover, and brought Lockett to the Nashville Film Festival for its premiere.

"It was just incredible," he gushes. "All these worlds just opened up. I love film festivals for that."

The short, about two soldiers whose job is to inform the next of kin that their relatives have died in combat, is currently being made available for fundraisers.

"For Vets, it's an important film," Lockett states.

So far, Lockett has composed music for half a dozen shorts, four of them 20 to 30 minutes in length.

He makes the process—"just watching the film and playing along"—sound easy, but also extols the collaborative style of creating that type of music, calling it "ego free."

Lockett travels extensively, mostly on the East Coast, but has also toured Mississippi, North Carolina and England.

Last year, he performed at England's Glastonbury Festival, the longest running music festival in the world. In three days, over 120,000 people saw him on stage along with musical acts like Coldplay, White Stripes and Van Morrison.

During one of his Mississippi adventures, Lockett tracked down a 70 something blues guitar player and singer to a small town called Burgaw. The musician, George Herbert Moore (who died in 2003), and Lockett ended up recording 30 songs written by Howling Wolf, Muddy Waters and Jimmy Reed.

"It was the purest music I've ever heard," says Lockett. "The man was just so full. He was just living the music."

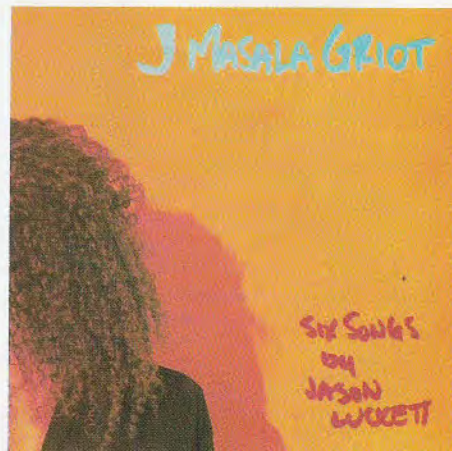
Lockett says he draws from his life experiences to tell stories.

"I plant different elements that people will share with me," he explains.

Living in L.A. gives Lockett access to older jazz musicians like Kenny Burrell. In awe, he relates how Burrell told him about playing with legends like Charlie Parker, Louis Armstrong and Buddy Collette.

"I'm not a jazz musician per se, but I get in and harmonize," Lockett states. "I can understand them."

One thing he dislikes about the L.A. music



scene, he complains is that it's "so showcase-oriented."

Elaborating, he says, "It's not about having a long sit-down and focusing on the music. (Instead,) everybody wants to be an expert to everybody."

But Lockett is diversifying.

Several weeks earlier, he performed at Chez Jean-Pierre at an event he organized with his sister. It included four short films, music, spoken word and poet Imani Toliver. Lockett enjoys interacting with communities and has appeared at World Stage often, not only as a musician, but as a poet, too.

Additionally, his music can be heard on the Internet at MSN Music and at I-tunes. He's also on the playlist at several radio stations.

As if he doesn't have enough to do with recording, performing and touring, Lockett, like his father before him, is also a mentor to inner-city teens.

"It's such a great tradition that I want to be a part of," he says. "I always wanted to be a giving person."

Lockett's website, www.jasonlockett.com, which he designed himself, boasts numerous categories including a journal where he blogs about his travels.

With so much going on, he just hasn't found time to settle down.

"I would love to have a family and all that," he says somewhat forlornly. "(But) music has been pretty good for me."

"At this stage of the game, I'm happy," he adds. "I'm making an album every few years, touring, doing a bit more film composing, and (living) a slightly less transient life."

Although he feels he's still under the radar, Lockett says he's visible enough that people buy his albums.

"I'm excited about what I do!" he concludes with flourish, flashing his famous smile.

No doubt, Jason Lockett is living his bliss. ■