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LatchKeyKid

Gavin Heaney launches new album at Saint Rocke

by Mark McDermott

There are many kinds of songwriters in this world: the earnest, clever, and the angry, the swooping, rocking and the sad. Some do a little bit of each, of course. Songwriting is a craft, and a good songwriter learns to use a broad palette.

But there are some things that cannot be learned. In particular, there is one rare kind of gift that only a few songwriters possess. This quality is hard to name but has something to do with melody and bounce and effervescence and the pure goodness of pop. Think mid-60s Beatles, Stevie Wonder, Simon and Garfunkel: it's the ability to write songs that are like smiles.

Either you have it or you don't. And Gavin Heaney, aka Latch Key Kid, has it in spades. Although even Heaney isn't sure what to call it. "Jingles, I guess?" he says.

Jingles, hooks, and harmonies – whatever they are, Heaney's songs are travelling far and wide from their modest beginnings at his home studio in Manhattan Beach. In the evolving post music-industry world – where radio play no longer rules the day – Heaney is being heard through the fine art of song placement in movies, television shows, and yes, even advertisements.

His song "Good Times" has travelled widest. It was the song used for the James Carville-Bill Frist-Washington D.C. Coca Cola commercial unveiled during the 2008 Super Bowl. This year, the Judd Apatow buddy movie *I Love You, Man* featured "Good Times" both for its title credits tune and as the lead song on the film's soundtrack.

"It's really highly licensed," Heaney said. "I'm kind of surprised at how that thing has kept going... That was the number one song on the soundtrack and they had other bands like Rush, Dean Martin, Beck – a bunch of different legitimate artists. That was cool."

"Good Times" eventually found its way to Australia where it was used as the opening song for the hit TV show *Packed to the Rafters*, which is famous for launching artists (last year, Jason Mraz's "I'm Yours" was featured on the show and made him a huge star Down Under). The song caught the attention of Warner Music Australia, who subsequently bought the distribution rights to the new Latch Key Kid album, *All Becomes One*.

But the record – which will officially be launched state-side with a Sept. 17 show at Saint Rocke – still belongs to Heaney. Much has been made of the demise of the music industry, but for an artist like Latch Key Kid, the newly emerging forms of distribution represent liberation day.

"Now a record deal becomes an afterthought," Heaney said. "It's ideal. This Warner Brothers deal is just a distribution deal – for three to five years, they have the right to distribute the album in Australia and New Zealand but not the rest of the world. And they don't own the music."

Songs from the new record are likewise finding placement in various places – in *The Ghost Whisperer* and *The*

Amazing Race TV shows, on the upcoming movie *The Invention of Lying's* trailers, in advertisements for Gottschalks department stores, Pioneer, and even a Roger's Wireless commercial in Canada.

And every last one of these songs was written, performed, recorded, and produced in the basement of a house in Manhattan Beach. Heaney played every instrument and sang every note.

"That is the biggest trip now," he said. "The music that I'm composing and producing is going straight to the silver screen or the TV or the radio, and nobody seems to notice it was done in the dungeon, in the basement, in the homemade studio. It's great."

Heaney is a modern day musical jack-of-all-trades, in a sense. He also teaches guitar and has written soundtracks. He has written for two seasons of *The Amazing Race*, one which was based in South America and allowed him explore his minor-chord dramatic gypsy-tinged side. He even taught himself how to write in Spanish, and has considered releasing his "sonidos en espanol" as an album.

"I did a bunch of music like that cool Gypsy King style guitar which is so fun to do,"

he said. "I had a ton of songs and I actually started writing lyrics to them in Spanish, which is kind of fun, using Google translator and a little help from Spanish-speaking friends for the grammar."

Another season was based in Asia, and Heaney found himself using a gamelan and writing a Pink Floyd-inspired trippy tune he titled, "The Dark Side of Lao Szu."

But Heaney is still foremost a songwriter in a somewhat more traditional sense. He writes albums, sort of old fashioned LPs that are thematically and musically coherent. *All Becomes One* is a deceptively deep record. It's mainly sunny in vibe, but packs an occasional political punch and explores themes of love and loss and acceptance of things past.

"It's a slow burner," Heaney said. "The songs, none of them jump out and light the world on fire – but, you know, that is more my style. You listen to the album, you pick up a couple songs, next thing you know you are listening to the whole thing through and all the songs grow on you."

That songs-like-smiles, lightness-of-being quality Heaney possesses allows him to get away with things. He can write a perfectly poppy song that actually kicks some political ass. A few years ago, he wrote "Coming Home Soon", a reggae-tinged surf song that was one of the best anti-war songs in recent memory. This time around, he unleashes a Lennon-esque song called "Almost Anything" that actually might be an angry song were it not so damned warm and sweetly melodic. It's quietly:

"Every morning you wake up and you go to work just like machines/Doing your thing/You're just sleep walking, your heads are in the clouds, you're living in a dream/In your dreams/The television and the politician they don't mean a thing to me/Not a thing/And your religion and the inquisition never get me to believe/In anything/Take a step for-



Latch Key Kid plays Saint Rocke on Sept. 17.

ward/Take two steps back/Bend over backwards/And cut yourself in half/Do almost everything they're telling you to do/Buy almost anything, they're selling it to you...

Heaney said the song is his "Imagine."

"That is probably my favorite song on the album," he said. "I wrote it years ago. It's kind of a political song, and it's kind of a little indicting, but it definitely sounds beautiful. So people, I don't think they would take offense to it, but they let their guard down to the thought of the song."

The album has plenty of songs that don't mean a thing other than a good feeling – the schoolboy romance of "You're the One," for instance, or the broad smile of "Feel So Fine." There are pacifically philosophical songs, like the downright pretty little gem, "This World Keeps on Turning." But there is also some pretty serious heartbreak going on in songs such as "Never a Good Time" and the title track "All Becomes One." The latter, in particular, carries a weary bit of wisdom – it's not just about getting your heart ripped out, but actually moving on.

"The song is addressing heartbreak basically and how it is irreparable," Heaney said. "But, you know, it's almost like a prayer, saying one day it's going to be resolved and we can get over the limitations we have... This is the rub, man, either you are alone and you never get to experience the great part of that, which is the joy of having a relationship. But there is definitely the risk. That is exactly what 'All Becomes One' is all about – trying to cure that heartbreak, which at the time can seem inconsolable. And sometimes it is."

"You know times cures all," Heaney added. "It's such a cliché...but it sucks, because you have to wait it out. You can't just be like, 'Okay I understand that time cures all. Why can't I just feel better now?' No. You have to wait. It's like a hangover. You just have to go through every twist and turn of it until you are done. You did the crime now you've got to pay the time."

The show at Saint Rocke next Thursday is Latch Key Kid's first real gig this year. Heaney has taken his time and put together a band he believes can actually bring the many layers of the recorded music to the stage – drummer Taylor Kennedy, keyboard player Kenny Harrison, bassist Rand Anderson, and saxophonist Ray Zepeda.

"I was tired of just getting by playing the songs when I really wanted to make them sound how they do on the CD," Heaney said. "We always jam out, and that's always the fun part, but I really wanted to play songs like 'This World Keeps on Turning' with the buildup and all the different instruments coming in instead of just seeing what somebody comes up with improvising on the stage."

Heaney is ready to roll out the album. The goal is simple: "Get the band tight and get out there and play some shows," Heaney said. "And show that is more than just a couple jingles here and there – there is actually a band playing music."

Latch Key Kid plays Saint Rocke Sept. 17. \$10. Free CDs at the show, and a free T-shirt with a presale ticket. See Latchkeykid.org or sainrocke.com for more information. ER



The new Latch Key Kid album, *All Becomes One*