

JASON FALKNER

ACCOMPLISHED POP FOR GRAY DAYS

By John Davidson

JASON FALKNER IS ENJOYING QUITE A CAREER FOR A GUY SO many people have never heard of. He started out as a teenager playing guitar with **THE THREE O'CLOCK** in the final throes of L.A.'s Paisley Underground pop scene (on their final LP, 1988's *Vermilion*), and followed that with membership in the almost-famous retro pop of **JELLYFISH** and **THE GRAYS** (the latter with equally talented current solo artist/producer **JON BRION**). These groups led to a major label deal as a solo artist in his own right, yet a lack of corporate support doomed the two critically acclaimed albums he made for Elektra, 1996's *Author Unknown* and 1998's *Amazing the Survivors*. Unfettered, the past few years have found Falkner working full time on a number of projects, including the release of his stellar home demos on spinART Records as *Necessity: The 4-Track Years* and an extensive collaboration with French popsters **AIR**.

Good natured and witty, Falkner admits that it can be frustrating to be a hero of the underground. "Some days I'm really happy with this little niche that I've carved out," he says. "In L.A., for example, there's a lot of response to me. But yeah, I'm definitely frustrated, because I never really have had everything like management and all that stuff in place. I want a gun-toting manager," he laughs, "a guy that's going to kick your ass if you don't put me on the radio."

And considering the disparate bands that have inspired him over the years (he covered **THE KINKS**, **BRIAN ENO**, **TOM WAITS**, **SWELL MAPS**, **THE STRANGLERS**, **LEFT BANKE**, and many others on a Japanese-only compilation this year), it might seem strange that a guy like Falkner would aspire to mainstream success. But you can only ride the instability of the music industry for so long, and even the devoted cult of Fallnerds can't fund his future entirely. "The thing that I'm going to try to make happen is to try to get all the things you need to have a chance, to try to align them all," decides the singer/songwriter. "The type of success I'm looking for is just the type where I'm able to a) make a little bit of a living and b) be able to sort of have an audience that isn't going to go anywhere. Like, **SONIC YOUTH** can always play, **ELVIS COSTELLO** can always play, even if he doesn't have an album out, and he'll sell out wherever he plays, as long as he doesn't get too ambitious. That's all I want, is to be able to be keep putting stuff out with a fan base that is really loyal. I already have that to some extent, but I'd like it to be a little bigger."

To that end, he has had to make some minor compromises to keep his career fresh. For example, taking the role of sideman again comes at the expense of time he could ordinarily devote to his own work. "Playing with other bands, such as saying yes or no to playing with Air, was one of the biggest dilemmas to me, because the commitment is long. Which on one hand is very exciting, but I've done all this work to not be a sideman—I don't wanna

be a goon. That was what I told Air, was that there has to be a way to figure out how I won't simply be a gunslinger."

Falkner's consummate, multi-instrumental talent is well regarded in the business, so it's not like his time is spare between albums, anyway. He routinely gets called into the studio to lay down guitar or vocal tracks for other bands, from his idols **GUIDED BY VOICES** to stranger pairings such as **MEGADETH**. More recently, he was tapped (the producer told him that he was "first on a list of one") to record an album of **BEATLES** covers for children, and similar to the Air project, it was something he couldn't pass up. "I had

to think about it for awhile, because covering the Beatles in any capacity is frightening to me. But when we talked about it and I found out it was going to be instrumental, and I had total free reign to do what I wanted to those guys, I couldn't resist. Plus, it's coming out on Sony so people are going to be made aware of it," he says of the upcoming release.

But all the stuff on the side is just to keep the momentum for what Falkner hopes will be another shot at success on his own. "You know, I'm beginning to realize that I have no friends," he says with a chuckle when asked why on his solo albums he wrote and played most of the instruments. "I think my next record is going to be some sort of band. The problem is finding guys that I want to be married to... when I'm completely happy with women! I had the same dream that everybody had when I was younger. You know, where you all live in the same house, and paint the van, and all that. It just didn't work that way for me, and maybe a lot of that is hindsight is my personality, but I think also, for whatever reason, that I was thrown together with people who also had problem with marrying other strong personalities."

It makes you wonder if Falkner can lay the bitter fields of the past behind him and plow onward. "The thing I feel right now more than anything," he elucidates, "is that by the end of

this year I'll be ready to make a record that I feel is the best thing I can make at this time. I feel like in the past, that while I was really fortunate to be left alone—I've never had a bossy A&R man, and I've been lucky, even when involved in a giant corporate situation, I demanded that I be left alone—when they acquiesced, that unfortunately meant that they didn't give a shit about the record. I mean, they did, but they couldn't go home to their spouse and say, 'There's this guy Jason I'm helping mold...' And that's what these kind of people want," he says with another laugh.

"I listen to my records now," he continues, "and I'm really proud of them. But I sort of know what I did wrong for myself and that's all I can care about. That's sort of what's on the horizon that's really most exciting to me."

And the way this guy can transcend his influences with an effortless melody, we think his second act might be just around the corner. ☺

