

Musician P.J. Pacifico soldiers on with solo act

By Chris Kocher

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Staff Writer

With his laid-back attitude and radio-friendly pop/rock tunes, P.J. Pacifico seems like a guy poised for the right boost to greater fame.

But few would guess from listening to his songs that he fell in love with music as a boy by listening to his mother's barbershop quartet.

"She was in the Sweet Aedlines, so they were always dolled up. She used to scare the living daylights out of me with all her makeup and costumes," Pacifico recalled with a laugh during an interview last week. "But once they started singing those harmonies, I said, 'What the heck is that? I want to do that!' That's how it started."

There's zero chance you'll see the Connecticut native in a boater hat and striped vest at his Cyber Café show this Friday, though — and that's a credit to his aunt, a Greenwich Village dweller who nurtured his interest in songwriters such as James Taylor, John Denver and Simon & Garfunkel. He carries on that tradition of storytelling on his second solo CD, "Always & Everywhere" (Viper Records), which was released last year.

Two tracks from the album have garnered airplay on AAA and satellite radio: "Jackbone," a mellowed-out ode to a vacation to escape life's pressures; and a stripped-down cover of the Beatles' "I Want to Hold Your Hand" with just Pacifico's vocals and ukulele. But he also shines on relationship songs such as "Girl from Montreal," about a first love met again many years later, and the poignant "Incognito," which ponders a couple's



PACIFICO

(temporary or perhaps permanent) separation.

Pacifico, 37, has been honing his craft since college and a stint in Sunflower, a band that ended up touring around the world to boost the morale of U.S. troops. He managed to see the pyramids in Egypt and plenty of other impressive sights — all on Uncle Sam's dime.

"We went to a bunch of places. The first tour was Egypt, Israel and Turkey, and the second one was the Caribbean, Ecuador, Honduras, Panama, Cuba, Puerto Rico. It was crazy!" he said. "Those soldiers kept us up partying. We were over there to boost the morale, but I think we did more morale-boosting offstage than onstage, for sure. They had us up until 5 a.m. every night. ...

"They were just so psyched to have some form of entertainment. It gave me such a different appreciation for the troops — they give it their all, and God bless them."

Sunflower fell apart after eight years of touring, but

ABOUT THE SHOW

- ▶ **Who:** P.J. Pacifico
- ▶ **When:** 9 p.m. Friday
- ▶ **Where:** Cyber Cafe West, 176 Main St., Binghamton
- ▶ **Admission:** Free (but donations gratefully accepted)
- ▶ **More information:**
www.pjpacifico.com;
www.cybercafevest.com

Pacifico's solo career has gained momentum. His 2005 debut, "Well I'll Be," also garnered critical acclaim, and he's opened for such heavyweights as Lynyrd Skynyrd, Sugarland, Levon Helm and Crosby, Stills & Nash.

He's picking up plenty of ideas along the way.

"Lately I've been leaning toward more universal lyrics. When I first started writing, it was so personal that people couldn't relate to it, because they didn't know what the hell I was talking about!" he said. "Now I've been trying to take what I've learned from those guys and make it more universal — maybe make it not 100 percent true. You can be a storyteller, and there is fiction."

Pacifico is currently plotting out his next CD, which he said will be more "alt-country folk-rock Americana" than the wider range of styles on "Always & Everywhere." Expect some of those new tunes at Friday's show.

"James Taylor always says to do a song a bunch of times before you record it and let it grow a little bit," he said. "You can go either way — you can go into the studio with no material and record all the spur-of-the-moment stuff, which I believe in, but I also believe in the James Taylor advice of letting stuff grow. So I'm torn! But this time I'm going with letting them grow a little bit."