

## John Sebastian/J Band Biography

Time flies. John Sebastian has been playing music for almost forty years. And in the two and a half decades since the breakup of the Lovin' Spoonful, Sebastian has enjoyed a formidable career as a solo artist. The first of the singer-songwriters of the seventies, he's always been a few steps ahead of a music industry that increasingly forces artists to neatly fit into Category A, B, or C. Refusing to be pigeonholed, John has carved his own artistic path, clearing the way for many to follow. It's been a career of many "firsts", and the rock history books will no doubt mention John Sebastian in several chapters. Strange, then, to hear him say that some of his most thrilling musical moments have happened in the last five years, recording and performing jug band music with the J-Band.

It was during appearances with Johnny Johnson and Jimmy Vivino (guitarist for Late Night's Max Weinberg Seven) that Sebastian began to rediscover the joy of bandwork. John frequently sat in with Jimmy and James Wormworth as The Black Italians. Soon after, Fritz Richmond was asked to join the band. A jug and washtub virtuoso, Fritz was an original member of Jim Kweskin's famous jug band in the '60's. Now the band was fully armed with washtub, jug, washboard and two no-nonsense architects, and they began work on the J-Band's first album for Music Masters, "I Want My Roots", a collection of Sebastian/Vivino originals and traditional jug band material.

Jug band music is the ancestor of modern electric blues with jug or washtub providing the bass line. The pioneers of this genre were among the first to play for the newly homogenized audiences of the American Industrial Revolution. Their rich mixture of blues, jazz, and popular music of the day, resulted in amazing recordings. These works inspired the beginnings of John Sebastian's career as a member of the Even Dozen Jug Band, a group of precocious New York folk kiddies with an unnatural fascination with the music of the great jug bands, and a desire to incorporate this style into the rapidly evolving urban folk scene. It was also the inspiration for the early Lovin' Spoonful, and was an important component of the Spoonful's musical palette. It also figured heavily in John's parallel career as an accompanist from the early days with such contemporaries as Tim Hardin, Fred Neil, Steve Stills, John Hammond, Rory Block, and Maria Muldaur, and more recently playing for Lonnie Mack, Willie Dixon, Levon Helm, as well as Johnny Johnson and Jimmy Vivino. Perhaps Sebastian has always been primed to write and perform jug band music. Careful examination of his earliest compositions are evidence of this.

Jug bands have a way of expanding and contracting to fit the occasion,, and the J-Band is no different. During the recording of "I Want My Roots", John met Paul Rishell and Annie Raines, a Cambridge duet who sound like they just fell out of a boxcar. Soon Paul's masterful guitar and mournful vocals - and the new double harmonica attack of Sebastian and Raines - was bringing the J-Band through another metamorphosis.

But the real jug band miracle to materialize during these sessions was the legendary Yank Rachel. A member of the original "3 J's" jug band with Sleepy John Estes and Jab Jones, Yank was the J-Band's holy grail; a blues mandolinist of such subtlety and grace, undiminished by his seventy years of playing. The band flew to Indianapolis, where Yank had lived since the fifties, and recorded what would be the climax of the J-Band album. This was followed by a series of concerts featuring Yank, that included a tribute to Gus Cannon on Beale Street, the Handy Awards, and the College Avenue Theater in Brownsville, Tennessee, where Yank had never been allowed to play, half a lifetime ago.

So where does the J-Band go from here? Today's popular music scene seems to be drifting away from midi guitars and computerized drums, and the recent proliferation of acoustic performers and coffee-house venues is generating a whole new audience for John Sebastian and Co. And as the J-Band heads into the millennium, new opportunities present themselves; successes Late Night with Conan O'Brien, tours of Britain and Scandinavia, and a memorable Wolf Trap performance opportunity to play with singer-arranger, Geoff Muldaur - (also a Kueskin alumnus) attest to a band still in evolution. As for Sebastian, he was recently asked to join a delegation of songwriters on behalf of the National Music Publishers Association along with Lamont Dozier, John Hartford, Allen and Marilyn Bergman, Mike Stoller and Cy Coleman. And that's as close to the oldies circuit as he wants to get.

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