

JON McL

Jon McLaughlin

If honesty is the mark of a great artist, Jon McLaughlin is without question on the right track: *Indiana*, his major-label debut album is as honest as it gets. Named for the young pianist/singer/songwriter's home state, the disc is essentially his diary cracked wide open for all the world to read and relate to. "This is me," he sings in the refrain on the disc's opening cut, "Industry."

Through its emotional ups and downs, its sweeping, hooky and earnest piano-pop, *Indiana* finds the 24-year-old, Indiana based singer working through romantic tests, and even finds him candidly discussing the status of his young career.

"There are songs about relationships, girls, faith, friends, family, and there are even some songs about the music industry," he says. "It's a debut album. Nobody knows how the album's gonna go, I don't know how my career is gonna go, so some songs are about that—me trying to venture out into the big world, and make it work."

It's also an album about taking stock of all that's good and bad in your life. McLaughlin dubbed the album *Indiana* during a point when he was in California and away from his Midwestern hometown for the first time in his life for an extended period of time—at a time when he was better able to recognize what's beautiful and easily taken for granted in small town America.

"I have sort of a love-hate relationship with the place that I grew up in, like anybody who grew up in a small town, and hasn't left by the time they're 24 years old. But around the time we did this album, I developed a deeper appreciation for the fact that I'm rooted in this area, the values and everything that I experienced growing up. For the longest time, all it was to me was just an address, but as I've gotten older, I've begun to appreciate the feeling here that your immediate surroundings are all you need."

In the song's sly stanzas, the title track pays homage to his home state, via a string-laden piano ballad. But the songs on *Indiana* deal in emotions as prevalent in Timbuktu as they are in the heartland: "After all, we're only human," McLaughlin sings in the chorus of the ultra-catchy jewel "Human."

Indiana was recorded over two sessions, the first produced by Greg Wells (Rufus Wainwright, Natasha Bedingfield, OTEP) and the second, primary session by Jamie Houston (Santana, Jessica Simpson, Macy Gray). Its songs were written by McLaughlin, with a host of co-writers, including noted writing/production team the Matrix, Grammy-winner Marcus Hummon, Matthew Gerard and Kevin Griffin (of Better Than Ezra).

Raised in Anderson, some 40 miles northeast of Indianapolis, McLaughlin grew up the son of a bass player in a home surrounded by music. His siblings played piano, and he began taking classical lessons at age 4. But it wasn't until he was 18 before he realized he could start blending his young skill with his love for pop music, and especially piano-pop icons Billy Joel and Elton John.

When he reached high school, while he occasionally sat in with friends' rock bands, he was also growing tired of the work that came with lessons. On a weekly basis he fought his parents over continuing: "It was like a ritual. Every week, I would come home and talk my mom into letting me quit, and then my dad convinced me to keep going." At the same time, he fell in love with Ben Folds Five's *Whatever and Ever Amen*.

Attending college at Anderson University School of Music, a tiny liberal arts college in his hometown, he hunkered down in a tiny practice room, constantly practicing, writing and singing. When he was a sophomore, the school created its own label, Orangehaus, and held a competition to find its first release. McLaughlin won the contest, which birthed his self-titled debut, which he calls a "grab bag of moments within a year of being out of the house, and experiencing real relationships and questions of faith." (Re-recorded versions of two of the songs from that disc, "Industry" and "Already In," appear on *Indiana*.)

In June 2005, having just graduated from Anderson, and with a slew of new songs under his belt, McLaughlin went into the studio for a couple of hours and banged out the piano-vocal EP *Songs I Wrote and Later Recorded*, which revealed a more intimate side. "It wasn't really done with much an artistic purpose," he laughs. "I had a bunch of songs that I was sick of people not being able to listen to."

That month, McLaughlin made a long-awaited trek to New York to showcase in front of three major labels, including Island, whose talent scout had discovered McLaughlin on the Internet. A few days after a brief performance for the A&R staff and label chief L.A. Reid, McLaughlin inked a deal with Island.

Over the past two years, McLaughlin has been quietly building a strong grass-roots following. The four *Indiana* tracks on his MySpace page (www.myspace.com/jonmclaughlin) have collected some 350,000 plays (averaging 2,000 plays per day), and he's criss-crossed the states opening for the likes of O.A.R., Live, Sister Hazel, Cowboy Mouth, Susan Tedeschi, and Marc Broussard.

Just as he finished recording *Indiana*, McLaughlin also scored a role in the forthcoming Disney animated/live action comedy *Enchanted*, starring Patrick Dempsey and Amy Adams. In the film, McLaughlin is seen performing on a ballroom stage. The film is slated to be released in the summer 2007.

"I just want to keep writing songs about my life and my beliefs and just be honest," McLaughlin says, looking forward. "I want to keep writing songs about how I feel. I want to do that and stay true to that, and hopefully people will relate to how I'm feeling, and learn things about themselves from what they hear—and, hopefully, some good, positive experiences will come out of that."

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