Pop Talk: Musician Drew Andrews is a citizen of the world

by George_Varga

Drew Andrews is becoming a seasoned international traveler - and he has his love of music to thank for his constantly growing number of frequent-flyer miles.

DREW ANDREWS - Singer, songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Drew Andrew recently launched a 15-city European tour with From the Shade, a new three-piece group that teams him with fellow Album Leaf members. CNS Photo by K.C. Alfred. The lowdown on Andrews

MUSICIAN: Drew Andrews

AGE: 29

LATEST RELEASES: "I Could Write a Book - Europe Tour 2008 EP" (released March 12) and "Only Mirrors" (due out later this year)

WEB SITE: myspace.com/drewandrews and drewandrews.org

KEY QUOTES: "In one way, rock 'n' roll is the best job you could ever have. There's a freedom, an ability to speak your mind and say what you feel that is very powerful and it's rare people get the opportunity to do that. But it also takes a lot of work and discipline, if you're serious about it. Anyone can make albums on their computers. But if you want to really get out in the world and be able to tour and store up all these new experiences, it takes a lot of work. Ultimately, the only person who will get stuff done for you is you. So, if you're not willing to be your own manager, songwriter, booking agent - pretty much everything - then I don't know if it's worth it." As a touring member of the acclaimed San Diego indie band The Album Leaf, this singer, songwriter and multi-instrumentalist last year played concerts and festivals in Singapore, Taiwan, Japan, Mexico, Canada and across the United States.

He recently launched a 15-city European tour with From the Shade, a new three-piece group that teams him with fellow Album Leaf members Matthew Resovich (on violin, keyboards and vocals) and Andrew Pates (who provides live performance visuals, including videos, original filmwork and old Super 8 footage).

To promote his upcoming debut solo album, "Only Mirrors," Andrews hopes to launch a U.S. solo tour with his own four-man band this summer. As a member of the San Diego trio Via Satellite, he'll soon be working on a remix project for the Illinois post-shoegaze band Headlights. Via Satellite is also completing preparations for an online-only record release of B-sides and rarities.

While he is delighted by the opportunities his musical pursuits have afforded him to see the world, Andrews, 29, had never toured abroad until a 2004 tour of Japan with The Album Leaf. When he co-founded Via Satellite as a teenager in 1998, just venturing beyond the county line seemed almost unthinkable.

"Getting into touring is very daunting for any new musician," said Andrews. "When Via Satellite started, we didn't even know how to book a show in San Diego, let alone plan an international tour. A lot of it, you just have to learn for yourself."

Andrews was only 2 years old when his parents had him begin taking classical piano lessons. While he says now that he "hated" having to practice nightly to the constant ticking of a metronome under his father's watchful eye, he credits his parents for sparking his lifelong love of music.

"It was great that they had the foresight to give me that daily discipline," he said. "Once I stopped taking lessons, the creative part never stopped. Then, a bunch of my friends started playing alternative-rock and that's when I started playing guitar. My two big inspirations then were Smashing Pumpkins and Nirvana."

Andrews' range of favorites has since broadened considerably and he counts Bjork, Nick Drake, Stevie Wonder, George Harrison, Leonard Cohen and Flaming Lips among his favorite artists. Not coincidentally, his carefully crafted songs are simultaneously grounded in tradition and forward-looking.

"I'm standing on the shoulders of all these amazing musicians and songwriters who came before me," he said. "At the same time, I'm striving to get to the bottom of the pile and knock it all out so that I can do my own thing.

"I have a reverence for where music has come from and - at the same time - a complete disregard for it. I think artists who do that make really interesting music."

Andrews credits Album Leaf mastermind Jimmy LaValle not only as a musical mentor but for helping him get various day jobs when both were still toiling to make ends meet. The Album Leaf, whose albums are largely one-man-band projects, started touring and LaValle invited Andrews to perform with him on the road.

Andrews' tours here and abroad with The Album Leaf inspired Via Satellite to launch a national tour of its own. His absorbing 11-song debut solo album, "Only Mirrors," was born in the aftermath of a 2005 Via Satellite tour that saw nearly all of the band's equipment stolen in New York. The only instrument Andrews had upon his return to San Diego was an old nylon-string acoustic guitar. He used it to write many of the atmospheric songs on "Only Mirrors," which was co-produced by his father, San Diego indie music mainstay Sven-Erik Seaholm.

"Drew previously recorded at least two other solo albums that he's never put out," said LaValle, who has asked Andrews to be the best man at his wedding in July. "Sometimes, I feel like maybe I have something to do with it, because he's so busy working with me. So, I'm really glad he's finally done something and that it sounds so great."

Andrews spent several years honing the understated songs for his introspective album, which he recorded in a whirlwind 11 days at his father's studio. Its completion has proven cathartic for him, creatively and personally.

"The music I make is always in response to what is happening in my life, and this album was inspired a lot by my travels," he said. "There's definitely a personal element to my songs, but they are not all about me. A lot of times, I create songs about people I see or friends of mine. The story is more important to me than whether I'm completely bleeding my heart out."

Pop Talk: Musician Drew Andrews is a citizen of the world by George_Varga