



JON MCLAUGHLIN IS A CHILD OF THE EIGHTIES—LITERALLY and musically. On his second Island Def Jam release, 2008's *OK Now*, the 26-year-old singer/songwriter revels in the elements that defined that decade's pop, from buoyant, hooky vocal melodies and motoric grooves to classic synth flavors.

"My first record, *Indiana*, was very piano-based," he says. "But this one's a little more upbeat—I really went back to some '80s roots." McLaughlin's blend of retro and modern sensibilities propelled the album to the #2 spot on Billboard's Top Christian Albums, while the first single, "Beating My Heart," has reached #17 on the Hot Adult Top 40 charts and is still climbing.

It's just the latest step up in a career that's already included tours with Kelly Clarkson and Sara Bareilles, not to mention song placements in television shows and films such as *Scrubs* and *Bridge to Terabithia*. McLaughlin also appeared in the hit Disney film, *Enchanted*, performing the Alan Menken/Stephen Schwartz song "So Close," and reprised the song on the 2008 Academy Awards telecast.

JON MCLAUGHLIN THE NEW VINTAGE



“THE CP300 HAS BY FAR THE BEST PIANO SOUND OF ANY KEYBOARD I’VE EVER PLAYED.”

The soaring pop perfection of McLaughlin’s new release is all the more striking considering his state of mind going into the process. “*Indiana* was my first major-label release, and by the time it was done, I was pretty burned out on writing,” he confesses. “Until then, it was just me in my dorm room, writing songs in my spare time. I never had any deadlines, and I definitely didn’t have a big company waiting on me to write a record. So I was ready to take a break for a bit.”

In fact, he says, “I didn’t write a single song for over a year! And as time went on, I was starting to freak out. Because you always wonder, every time you write a song, if that’s the last one you’re going to write. You always feel like you just squeezed by—like okay, I’m proud of that one, but that’s the last one.”

Fortunately, his concerns were premature. “I think I had a lot bottled up,” he says. “Once I started writing again, it all came out quickly, and I ended up writing a lot of songs in a really short time.”

Surprisingly for an artist known for his outstanding piano work, McLaughlin wrote much of the new record on guitar. “For piano players, that’s our life struggle, trying to figure out how to play—you can’t just grab your keyboard from the bus and plug it in anywhere. And I don’t really play guitar, so I had to dumb it down quite a bit. I’ve tried to get better since then, and I play a little guitar onstage now, but at the time I was awful!”

But Jon’s lack of six-string skill had hidden benefits: “I’ve been playing piano for over 20 years, and it’s easy to get stuck doing your own little tricks all the time,” he observes. “The guitar forced me to come up with melodies that could stand on their own. That’s why the feel on this record is a little different. Sonically, the guitar gives you a break, so when the piano comes in it’s featured more.”

At home, McLaughlin usually writes on a Yamaha P250, which he toured with until recently. But onstage the P250 has been retired in favor of Jon’s new Yamaha CP300—a keyboard he says is right in line with the new record’s modern-retro sensibility.

“What first drew me to the CP300 was how big and boxy it is,” McLaughlin explains. “I really like that look. I wanted something vintage-looking, something that looked old. You know, like an old computer that’s just gigantic, from the ‘80s—that old, retro stuff just looks cool. That’s why I got it in the first place.”

But sonics soon eclipsed aesthetics. “The CP300 has by far the best piano sound of any keyboard I’ve ever played,” says Jon. “And it’s the most piano-like of any keyboard I’ve played. Ideally, I’d love to drag around a big Yamaha C7, but if you can’t do that, the CP300 is by far the closest thing.”

As he tours in support of *OK Now*, McLaughlin keeps a steady eye on the future. He hopes to place more songs in television shows and movies, and looks forward to learning more about studio production as he continues to write and record.

But for now, it’s all about playing live. “We’re putting together some more dates for next year,” he says. “We did one nationwide tour in the summer, but we feel like things are growing to the point where we really need to get back to all those markets and play them some more. So we’re just going to stay out on the road. It’s going to be a lot of touring!”

