



THE SONG MAN FROM SALMON ARM

How did a backcountry boy perfect such a smooth, sophisticated, and undeniably urban pop sound? Greg Sczebel's songs glisten with irrepressible hooks and polished production. It's hard not to make comparisons to such great singer/key-boardists as Elton John, Stevie Wonder, and Billy Joel. Yet Sczebel doesn't sound strictly retro—you also hear such modern influences as Alicia Keys, Jamie Cullum, and John Legend.

"I grew up listening to black gospel music and singing in church," explains Sczebel (pronounced "seh-bell"), speaking from his home in Salmon Arm, British Columbia, a picturesque hamlet on the shores of Shuswap Lake, five hours northeast of Vancouver. "I loved the Winans and Andraé Crouch. The movie *Sister Act 2* was monumental in my development as a musician and singer. When I got into my teens, people started comparing me to Stevie, Elton, and Billy Joel, and I didn't know their music at all! I'm still just discovering stuff that has probably been in other people's libraries for years, whether it's the Beatles or old Michael Jackson stuff."

When Greg hit high school, he started thinking seriously about pursuing a music career. "I realized that if I really wanted to do this, I had to commit to it and work hard," he recalls. "I made a two-year plan after high school to work on music full-time. I told myself that if it went well, I'd keep going. If it didn't, I'd go to university and get a real job." He chuckles. "It's been about eight years now, and I still don't have a real job!"



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That success is a testament to both Greg’s appealing music and his marketing smarts. He’s cracked the Canadian music scene despite minimal budgets and no big-label support. “I’m completely independent,” he says. “I’ve had major-label interest, but it just wasn’t the right fit. If the right team comes along someday, that’s great. But if not, I still have to do what I have to do—and that means a lot more than writing and playing songs. You have to get people’s attention, and that’s harder and harder to do with so much music out there.”

For Greg, it means establishing and maintaining direct contact with his fans. “If you don’t have fans, you don’t have a career,” he states. “Nowadays fans expect that you interact with them, and that’s something I really try to do. Whether it’s Facebook, Twitter or YouTube, I try not to keep any distance.”

But Sczebel’s fan-appreciation policy doesn’t stop there. He recently presented one lucky fan with something a bit more substantial than a Tweet: a new car!

“Nissan Canada had a contest where they gave away 50 new Cubes to the country’s 50 most unique and creative individuals, based on voting,” Greg explains. “I wrote a couple of silly songs and made a couple of silly videos about the Cube. They got a lot of hits, and the Nissan people loved them. I won the car just when I was launching my last album, *Love & the Lack Thereof*. I had no marketing budget, but a friend who worked in marketing suggested I give the car away. The rules said that I had to keep it for a year, so we turned it into a yearlong contest for fans who helped promote me on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. We had thousands of entries. It was so cool how the fans got involved and started to become friends with each other.”

Sczebel also promotes his music via relentless touring—sometimes with a full band, sometimes with drummer/percussionist Dan Oldfield, and sometimes with only his Yamaha CP300 Stage Piano. “The CP300 is definitely my go-to for shows,” he says. “I can’t haul around a grand piano, but at least I can get a keyboard that feels and sounds amazing. I still remember visiting a music store with my parents to get my first keyboard. As soon as I sat down with a Yamaha, everything else seemed disappointing, and it’s been that way ever since.”

Greg is currently refining material for his next album. “I’ve always hung out more on the soul side of things,” he says, “but these new songs are a bit more in the piano-pop vein, which is a bit of a departure for me. But it’s healthy to grow and venture into new areas. I’m really excited about the new direction.”

You can learn more about Greg and his music at www.gregsczebel.com. (But sadly, a lucky fan has already claimed that car.)