

# G. Love and Special Sauce Keep Jamming



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In the beginning, Philadelphia native Garrett "G. Love" Dutton, who hit the national music scene like a fourth Beastie Boy crossed with splashes of Beck and Bob Dylan, created the song "Cold Beverage" with his two-man backing band, Special Sauce.

The year was 1994, the shambling song came from the trio's self-titled debut, and it slowly became a radio and MTV hit, fusing hip-hop to vintage blues, jazz and funk. The lively, lighthearted, summertime sing-along jam was highly popular on the East Coast, and the tune helped push that album's sales past the gold mark.

G. Love immediately realized the record was special. So the former busker turned budding superstar with the electric guitar, harmonica strapped around his neck, old-school high-tops and pork-pie hat decided to hit the road something fierce to keep the momentum rolling.

In the years that followed, he and the band would never again enjoy a hit on the level of "Cold Beverage." But something else happened along the way as they played hundreds of shows a year, shrewdly aligning themselves with the post-Grateful Dead jam-band scene that

blossomed in the '90s. They retained favor among the college kids...OK, the frat-and-sorority scene that embraced "Cold Beverage" (natch). G. Love and Special Sauce became a viable and quite successful live act, to this day consistently packing venues large and small even as its albums have moved small numbers and been ignored by the mainstream media.

"I think the most important thing a musician can do is to connect with an audience," the 35-year-old G. Love says. "If you have an audience, you can tour. If you can tour, you can make records. It's that simple."

While acknowledging G. Love's hard-earned standing in the live music arena, it would be unfair to give short shrift to either the 10 albums the band has made or the steady evolution of its sonic repertoire from the beginning to now. Except for the occasional stripped-down, throwback party groove, those early, gloriously rickety front-porch and street-corner jams have grown denser and more sophisticated with appropriations of classic Philly soul stylings, reggae, folk, even acid-tinged psych-rock.

In fact, if you're coming back to the band after a long hiatus via its recent 10th album, *Superhero Brother*, you might be amazed at the growth in the band's sound and vibe. It's the third G. Love and Special Sauce disc to be released on Brushfire Records, the label owned by surfer and laid-back acoustic-pop singer-songwriter Jack Johnson. The pair first met back in 1997, when G. Love was introduced to Johnson by a mutual friend, photographer Scott Soens, who has also directed a handful of Johnson music videos in addition to some skate and surf films.

"It's been an amazing ride," G. Love says of the association, which previously delivered his 2004 album *The Hustle* and 2006's *Lemonade*. "Ever since I signed with Brushfire, it seems like my whole career has been revamped."

Certainly, G. Love has benefited to some degree from being championed by Johnson, who has turned into an unlikely superstar in recent years. And he says he's much happier being involved with the independent-minded, eco-friendly Brushfire model than the Epic major-label machine he was on previously, though he did manage to survive on a major for six albums.

"The music business has definitely lost some of the mystique of the old days," he says. "It seems open to anyone these days. When I was a street musician, the big record companies seemed a million miles away. It seemed like it was: Make the big-time or nothing at all. These days, the music business seems a lot closer because of the Internet. It's also a catch-22, because it seems harder than ever to make it."

In the beginning, G. Love's prime motivation was to emulate two of his biggest idols, Bob Dylan and John Hammond: "They both made their first records at 20 years old. When I was 17 years old, I made a goal (or a pipe dream) to make a record by the time I was 20. I completed my first record at 21."

And now, 10 albums in, his goals have become broader—and in some ways more meaningful. "I thought success would be making one record. That was what I set out to do. But as you get further along, you can see the possibilities are endless. I think success is making people

feel the music. This can happen every night, whether you're in a stadium or the corner bar."