

Love: Thy neighbor

G. it's good to be back in Boston

By Christopher Blagg

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Like cheese steaks, G. Love & Special Sauce will always be linked with Philadelphia. Yet Boston can also lay claim to the raspy-voiced music veteran: it was Beantown where he formed his band; it's also the place G. Love (real name: Garrett Dutton III) now calls home.

Back in 1992, G. Love, whose new album

“Superhero Brother” comes out tomorrow, was playing on the streets of Boston and Cambridge, busking his hip-hop/blues hybrid in Harvard Square. He soon met bassist Jim Prescott and drummer Jeffrey Clemens and formed G. Love & Special Sauce and

started landing gigs at clubs on Lansdowne Street and pubs like the Plough & Stars and the now-departed Tam O'Shanter.

The band's star didn't truly rise until the band relocated to Philadelphia. But 15 years later, G. Love is back living in Boston, the place of his musical birth.

"I definitely come from Philly and always represent Philly," said Love from his home in the South End last week, "but it was just a nice time for me to relocate up here for the last couple years. I just find Boston to be a tremendous music town. There's so many people performing music. I feel like I tap into the musical energy that's floating around in the air around here."

Reminiscent of his early Boston days, Love has returned to the pub scene recently, performing incognito at Matt Murphy's under the pseudonym The Phamily.

"It's obviously been a different experience because when I first got here I was a struggling street musician and now I'm a recording artist," said Love. "We kept it on the down low, didn't advertise it, and it was awesome. It's a great outlet for me."

The band's next show under the name G. Love & Special Sauce will be a grander affair: an Aug. 14 date headlining the Bank of America Pavilion.

Surviving 15 years in the music business is an accomplishment - and Love has managed his longevity without a commercial hit. He and Special Sauce came closest when their "Cold Beverages" video made it to MTV in 1994, but their success has been more slow burn than sudden meteor.

"We've always been on the edge of breaking out," Love said. "Because we've never had a huge commercial hit, we never had the, 'Oh they sold out, they're too commercial now' reaction. So that has always been special for the fans, people who've found us on their own. They feel like they own the music more, which is cool."

When G. Love and Special Sauce's debut came out, there was nothing else like it. No one was combining gutbucket acoustic blues with hip-hop. Today, their influence is pervasive, from Jason Mraz to Jack Johnson (whose career G. Love helped start).

“We originated that sound, and over the years you’ve seen a lot of people cop the style a little bit,” Love said. “But you can’t claim music like that. That’s how music is. It gets passed along.”

For the new record, Love didn’t reinvent the wheel. “Superhero Brother” may be less raw and minimalist than the band’s first albums, but it’s still the same G. Love & Special Sauce, with maybe a dash of social consciousness. As Love puts it, “The record is funky and a good time, but it also makes you think a little bit.”