

G. Love: 15 Years of the Hip-Hop Blues

By: Stratton Lawrence

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Fame came quickly to Garrett Dutton. In 1993, at 20-years-old, he was playing random bar gigs in Boston and working for an anti nuclear weapons non-profit when he met drummer **Jeffrey Clemens**. A few months later they joined with bassist **Jimi Prescott**, and Garrett became **G. Love** to everyone but his closest friends and family. Within two years, college kids were hoisting beers to "I

like cold beverages" toasts and boasting about their girlfriend's sauce. Having only released their self-titled debut in 1994, **G. Love and Special Sauce** already had a loyal following, and follow-up albums like *Yeah, It's That Easy* (1997) and *Philadelphonic* (1999) held their own on the charts.

But it wasn't quite enough for the band. Their fanbase wasn't exactly growing, and just as they introduced **Jack Johnson** to the world with his single "Rodeo Clowns" which G. Love put on 1999's *Philadelphonic*, they found themselves dropped by Sony, and then Universal soon thereafter. It's not that times were hard, just far from ideal. Since his childhood in the Philadelphia suburb of Society Hill, G. Love's enjoyed a privileged life. But, he'd tasted the big time and then seen his friends make it while he never quite broke into the amphitheatre bracket. Then came a record deal with Jack Johnson's Brushfire Records which put out 2004's *The Hustle* and *Lemonade*, his 2006 solo release that featured friends like **Ben Harper**, **Blackalicious** and **Lateef the Truth Speaker**. Suddenly, G. Love was big time. Last month, he released his tenth album, ***Superhero Brother*** (Brushfire), with Special Sauce returning as his full-time band. He followed that

up with a trip to Japan and a tour with Johnson in Europe. This August, he kicks off his first tour as the main act at some of the nation's largest and most notable venues.

JamBase caught up with G. Love on his way home to Boston from New York by train, fresh off his Japanese excursion. Clearly excited about the release of the new album, he talked enthusiastically about the joy of continuing to play music with his original core trio. From his buoyant attitude about performing and writing new songs, it certainly sounds like fifteen years of fame is just the start for this hip-hop bluesman.



JamBase: Some of your most famous songs are from your earliest albums, but you've enjoyed more commercial success in the last few years than ever before. From your own songwriting to the business side of things, what do you think has contributed to your career renaissance?

G. Love: It's definitely since we signed with Brushfire in 2002. That's when the momentum started swimming. For a while there, man, all my luck went away. When we put out *Philadelphonic* and introduced Jack [Johnson] on it, it was kind of a weird time for us. Jack started really taking off after that and it was like, "Goddamn, what the fuck happened?" We were kind of going down; the label didn't step up and make a video, and business stuff was slowing us down. We put out *Electric Mile* and were like, "Fuck this, let's just jam out." And you know what? It didn't do well and Sony dropped us.

I relate getting dropped by Sony to being in a bad relationship with a girl you love, but you can't get out of it because you're both afraid to leave. Finally you get dumped and you think it's really bad but it's the best thing that ever could happen to you.

JamBase: Was getting dumped by Sony really the lowest moment?

G. Love: Well, then we cut *Hustle* we thought it'd be this huge smash record, but it didn't do well and we got dropped again, by Universal. We were touring in Australia, playing a big show with Jack, [Donavon Frankenreiter](#) and [Xavier Rudd](#). There's like 30,000 people at this show, and backstage Donavon finds out his record went gold. Jack had an album out that week that was already platinum, and then I get that call from Universal. So, that was a hard day for me.

So that's when the Brushfire connection came about?

Yeah, **Emmett Malloy** [Brushfire Records co-founder] pulled me aside and said, "Look, we're going to find a way to put out your records. Don't stress." I realized what a family this was, so I stuck with it. Then *Lemonade* came out and the vibes just swung. I have no fucking idea [why], but whatever happens with *Superhero Brother*, we earned that shit. When shit's going well, I just give thanks, man.

You're a blues artist, but even in the "off years" most of your songs are pretty feel good.

To me, the blues is half and half. I definitely have a lot of dark and angry stuff. My



drummer really likes my salty shit. I dig albums like *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*. It's got poignant political songs like "Masters of War" but it's also got laugh-out-loud talking blues songs. To me, that's what it's all about.

That's one of the songs you make with your boys. We were out walking in Park City, Utah, and couldn't find any herb. My buddy starts singing, "Who's got the weed?"

like some drunk walking down the street, and we sang it all night long. We were like, 'That's a hit.'

-G. Love on his song "Who's Got The Weed"

JamBase: You write a lot about things you like - cold beer, lemonade and there's "Who's Got the Weed?" on the new album.

That's one of the songs you make with your boys. We were out walking in Park City, Utah, and couldn't find any herb. My buddy starts singing, "Who's got the weed?" like some drunk walking down the street, and we sang it all night long. We were like, "That's a hit." It's a swamp groove. I ran into **Tre Hardson** [[The Pharcyde](#)] a couple years ago at a Holiday Inn Express in Seattle, and we've been pretty tight since then, so I asked him to do that track with me.



Do you ever worry about touting marijuana use as a celebrity? That song starts with audio of a bong hit. Didn't you have a run-in with the cops on the Arizona/California border last year?

My lawyer got it dismissed, but it cost a lot of money and was a pain. We were coming through from a West Coast run and my buddies up in the Oregon area, they're growers, and they had laced us with all

this kind herb and we were kind of fucked up. It's one of those things where they're doing immigration checks and they had a checkpoint and pulled over our big tour bus. It's no joke. To me, now, it's not worth it to road trip and fly with shit because it's not worth getting busted. And I'm not advocating drug use; I'm just talking about my life. I'm not very discrete with my songwriting, and I'm not afraid. The main thing as a songwriter and as a person is just not to take myself too seriously. I know a lot of people that take themselves very seriously that do the same thing I do, and it's kind of bullshit. I'm just trying to have a good time.

On the title track, "Superhero Brother," which comes after "Who's Got The Weed?," you get slightly political, talking about ending the war and not fighting over oil fields and making coffee tables out of bombs.

Well, I've always been an activist. That song is a reaction to Bush getting reelected. I was disgusted because I felt like a lot of youth, even stoner kids, were voting Republican and celebrating him as a great leader. I think it's clear now that he'll go down as one of the worst presidents ever. That song was just to

joke and say, "Yeah, I can save the world with my guitar." It's utterly serious and simultaneously self-demeaning, making fun of us as musicians who think we can save the world with our music.

So, to you, it's okay for musicians to take a political stand on stage?

Concerts aren't usually the best time to have a political discussion, and with the people that go to these types of shows it's kind of like preaching to the choir. But, people like Jack, he puts his money where his mouth is. And I respect what

[Michael Franti](#) does.



Shifting gears, Gretsch just released a "G. Love Corvette" guitar. That's got to be cool.

It's better than getting a record deal. It's a '60s style small solid-body, like their answer to the Gibson SG. It's a slick, kelly green guitar with a white racing stripe on it. And it sold out and is already on backorder. I got to pick out all the hardware and pickups and tuners. It's pro. I play it onstage, swapping off with my Les Paul and my old Italian pawn shop guitar that's like my signature instrument.

You've been through a handful of record labels and more than a couple shake-ups with your bandmates, but things seem to be on the up. Do you see yourself sticking with the Special Sauce for another fifteen years?

We get it done. We've got **Mark Boyce** with us on piano now, too, so he's officially in the band. There are some personality problems, which you see if you watch our DVD, but we've been through thick and thin and we're like brothers. We fight and get pissed off and make music and feel good again. It's a lot of family love, and at this point everyone's a grown man and this is our career. There's something very special about the fact that fifteen years later you can come out to a G. Love show and see the exact band that made the first record, and the guys that wrote the parts are still playing them. There's a lot of power in that. So, hopefully we'll keep it going as long as we can.

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