



Bennington Banner

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JD Malone reaches for stars but remembers roots

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JD Malone grew up writing songs in his head if not on paper. Now, 45-odd years into his musical journey, he has a firm grasp of the language he speaks: Americana.

Americana -- the musical genre -- is a blur of blues, folk and country rock that defies easy description but is gaining fans fast. Think Tom Petty, John Mellencamp, Steve Earle and Creedence Clearwater Revival.

Malone -- who was born and schooled locally as John Dennis Maloney Jr., but now lives in the Philadelphia area -- hopes to ride that "Americana" wave with his musical career shift into high gear with a new album -- the just released "Avalon" -- as well as a great band behind him and more new songs in his head.

"The new album just came out a couple weeks ago, so we are not traveling too far at this point," said Malone from his house in Phoenixville, Pa. "But we are staying busy."

Malone says he's just trying to get his music and his band out to a wider audience. And he thinks his current location is a good place to tour his music and his band from -- near New England, near New York City, not too far from a southern states swing.

Malone and his music is already getting some notice and some airplay, especially with the cuts "She Likes" and "Just Like New." According to his label, "Avalon" is hitting the Americana airplay charts and is getting airplay on dozens of radio stations, including on Vermont radio WMUD in Bridgeport and WNCS in Burlington.



JD Malone, known by some in the Bennington area as John Dennis Maloney Jr., has a new CD, a hot band, and a shot at the big time. (Supplied photo)

Local roots and love of music

Some people who knew Malone when he was growing up may be a little surprised that he is taking a serious shot at the big time; others may have expected it all along.

Malone grew up as just one of the local boys: born at Putnam Memorial Hospital [now Southwestern Vermont Medical Center] in 1965, the son of Dennis Maloney and Stephanie Chapko, the grandson of both John H. Maloney, who was sheriff of Bennington County for 39 years, and George F. Hoag, one-time police chief in Manchester.

He says growing up in a police family was no big deal, usually.

"I'm really not the party person, so I never felt limited," said JD. "On the other hand, it is nice to have friends in high places."

He attended school locally, played varsity football and baseball, and American Legion Post 13 baseball, and graduated from Mount Anthony Union High School in 1983.

"I left Bennington right out of high school, on July 5, 1983, and went into the U.S. Navy," he said. "I've never been back there to live, but I visit my family all the time." (During the interview, he asked to give a shout out to his nephew Kaine and niece Taylor.)

While his love of music dates back to before his high school days, his interest in being part of a band probably dates from his school days.

"I have been involved with music since I was young boy; I listened to a lot of music and liked a lot of music," said Malone. "Some friends and I won the first air band contest at Mount Anthony, in 1982. Our band name was Intruder. The first concert I ever went to was Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers -- 'Damn the Torpedoes' -- tour, at SPAC (the Saratoga Performing Arts Center)." he said.

Taking a shot at the big time

Back in the 1980s, Malone may have had dreams but he had no idea that 30 years later he would be working with one of music's best producers -- "Avalon" was co-produced by Phil Nicolo, a Grammy winner who has worked with Bob Dylan, Billy Joel and Lauryn Hill, among others.

"The reason why we picked him is that the band is really good live, and he has a reputation for working with bands like that and capturing that spark," said Malone. "He's a music lover first. He makes the artist feel at ease. It was just really excellent time."

Malone said he didn't really get involved with the mixing part of the CD production.

"I write the songs. I sing the songs. I perform the songs. I left that up to him," he said. "You have to let things go; you have to let the experts do their thing."

And he is really pleased with the result: "The keys to a good recording are simple. Is the song good? Is the performance good? Is the tone good. With Phil, the tone is good."

The music on the CD may be called "Americana" -- which means its a little blues, a little folk, a lot of country and a fair amount of rock. "That is exactly what Americana is. It is all that," he said.

But it is by no means an accident that the only cover on the CD is Creedence Clearwater Revival's 1960s classic "Fortunate Son" -- JD and the band love playing CCR covers live, and if there is a band the defines classic Americana, it is Creedence. "It does have a social relevance," he said. "It was written in the late '60s and it still is relevant."

But that doesn't mean JD and the Experts "sound" like Creedence; he knows it is important to sound like yourself.

"The process of writing songs is very personal," said Malone. "All my lyrics are in my head, I don't write my lyrics down. I want to sing like I talk. I write in the morning when I am fresh. Sometimes it comes quickly, easily. It is all about finding your voice, your process."

And as with all evolving artists, "Avalon," filled with songs the band has played live for a while, has been out just a couple weeks and Malone is already moving on.

"My music is constantly developing, some of the songs were written five or six year ago," said Malone. "Most songwriters are developing. Changing ... I write songs for my self, my personal well being. If it is a good song, I am able to find ways for people to relate to it."

For more information about JD Malone and the Experts, and the new CD "Avalon," visit jdmalone.com.

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