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Seth Glier to perform at University of Hartford

Seth Glier focuses on songwriting, grass-roots career

By Joe Myers

With a beautiful voice that has brought him comparisons with Mick Hucknall of Simply Red, Seth Glier could probably forge a successful career as a singer of other people's songs. But the 20-year-old Boston native came to music as a form of personal expression and hasn't really thought about singing anything but the songs he writes himself.

So far, that plan is working.

Glier arrives at the University of Hartford on Friday night for a stop on a 50-date national tour that continues through the fall. Glier's debut CD, "The Trouble with People," is set for release on the Internet next month and on CD in November.

In a recent phone interview, Glier said one of the reasons he dropped out of the Berklee School of Music in Boston was the vocal major's realization that singing was just a tool for him.

"Singing and playing the piano are utensils, they're not the meal," Glier said.

"I'm always writing," he noted, adding that the whole process is still somewhat mysterious to him. "There's lot of magic in it, lots of spirituality."

Glier attributes part of his development as a songwriter to the ongoing process of learning how to communicate with his 24-year-old autistic brother.

"Up until I was 16 or 17, I didn't really have much of a relationship because I didn't know how to talk to him. Then I learned (that communication) had nothing to do with talking -- it was all about listening," he said.

"My songwriting started to change. It was not about adding words but leaving them out. The songs became more ambiguous and started to resonate with people. My brother is my touchstone. A huge influence," Glier added.

Like everyone else trying to carve out a life in music these days, Glier has been forced to take charge of many aspects of his career that in an earlier era would have been left to a record company or management group.

He still acts as his own booking agent, and "The Trouble with People" is a remixed and somewhat polished version of recordings he made a year ago.

After MPress Records signed him, Grammy-winning producer Kevin Killen was brought in to remix the original tracks (Killen has a long list of credits that includes working on albums by U2 and Elvis Costello).

"I originally recorded it in my basement over the course of a month," he said, adding that Killen remixed the material, re-recorded some of the vocal and "tied up the loose ends."

"It was a lot more challenging than I anticipated. It was opening something up after a year away from it. It's very, very difficult to keep your head in that place," Glier said of returning to the recordings after a year of performing and writing other songs.

"I feel like I'm planting seeds with this record. ... I'm looking forward to all this touring, meeting people, seeing new places, because that always inspires me," he noted.

Glier likes the "grass-roots" nature of working in music these days, with a musician being able to control most of his own "image" on social networking sites, and a free flow of communication between artists and their fans.

The performer was written up in The Boston Globe last year when he decided to use the Internet to launch a small "fan-funded" tour. Glier was looking for \$500 to help pay some of his expenses and was shocked to receive three times that much.

"I did it just before I was offered (the record contract). I was a little nervous and felt a little weird asking people for money, but I found out there was a real community out there. There were people in Hong Kong who heard my music and sent me something. It changed how I look at my place in music. It's much more about community and building relationships than I thought," he said.

Seth Glier performs Friday at 7:30 p.m. at the Wilde Auditorium, 200 Bloomfield Ave., on the University of Hartford campus. \$18. 860-768-4228, www.hartford.edu. For more information on Glier, visit www.sethglie.com.