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## Playing a corporate gig: Franklin native performs in battle of company bands

By Chris Bergeron / News Staff Writer  
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Since first plucking out the bass line to "Dizzy Miss Lizzie" in his parents' basement on *New Year's Eve* 1981, Jon Svetkey has spent a decade crisscrossing the country as a singer-songwriter.

Last week the Franklin native made the biggest road trip of his life, driving his wife and two young children to hear him play in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Ohio.

Svetkey's alternative rock group, The Loomers, performed 45- and 15-minute sets in the Battle of the Corporate Bands Saturday, Oct. 2, in Cleveland.

"Just a total blast," said Svetkey, 38. "It was really cool to be on stage there."

Though The Loomers didn't win the Battle, Svetkey is thrilled to have performed with his boss and longtime band mates on the same stage where his idol Bruce Springsteen has appeared.

"I wouldn't do a thing differently," he said. "Performing in the Rock Hall of Fame was like a minor league baseball player getting to play in Cooperstown."

Svetkey played with fellow Loomers, Everett Pendleton, Jack Cavalier and Michael Cahill. "Honorary Loomer" Tom Simons, founder and president of PARTNERS + simons, where he works, joined the band on stage for half the set.

The Loomers earned the opportunity to appear in Cleveland by winning a Northeast regional competition that initially attracted 300 entrants in a national event sponsored by Fortune magazine. The fourth annual Battle of the Corporate Bands featured groups from North America, Europe and Australia.

To qualify, half the band members must work for the same company. Bass guitarist and vocalist Jack Cavalier is the company's controller.

Linking the corporate and rock worlds has been good business for Simons' company and The Loomers.

Simons played guitar in high school and college but in recent years has focused his energies on the Boston advertising firm he started 15 years ago.

Raising three children and running his business, Simons never forgot his rocking youth. "As my kids were growing up, as a rite of passage, I always took them to hear the Allman Brothers whenever they were in the neighborhood," he said.

He first met Svetkey at an advertising class, eventually hired him as a copywriter and then invited him to play at his company's Christmas party.

Simons joined in. "One thing led to another," he said, "And I played a couple of club dates with Jon and the band."

Since meeting Svetkey, the 51-year-old Harvard graduate has revived his musical career as an

Photo Gallery



Franklin's Jon Svetkey plays guitar on the stage of the Battle of the Bands at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland.

(Molly Simons photo)

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executive guitarist whose buttoned-down appearance conceals a rock star's love of performing.

He described his company as "the largest independent advertising firm in New England." Based in the South Boston waterfront, the company uses a specially written Loomers song, "PARTNERS + simons Blues" in its phone system when callers are put on hold.

Simons said having three Loomers in the office has been good for morale. "It's providing some wonderful energy. It's been putting a hop in most everybody's steps," he said. "Music is part of the culture. We've taken it to a national stage. People in the office are either thrilled or highly amused."

When The Loomers went on, Simons' wife and three adult children were in the audience watching him perform on the same stage where Dickey Betts, the Allman Brothers' former guitarist had played just four days before.

"I'm happy I held on to this dream which I'd assigned to a footlocker under my bed. Now, it's out in full view. This was the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame for goodness sake," he said. "My wife and kids were happy to see me having a good time. I'm not sure it helps me, though, in the coolness factor."

After a solo career, Svetkey formed The Loomers in 1996 as an "acoustic, guitar-driven rock band" that plays his original songs in Boston-area locations including The Hard Rock Cafe, Club Passim and Johnny D's. The Loomers have released two albums, "Escalation" and "Simple As That."

Svetkey said the band's name comes from a cranky music producer with a penchant for nicknames who described a band member as "someone who's just looming around."

He'd grown up in Franklin in the 1970s and '80s listening to The Beatles, Led Zeppelin and The Police "learning to play guitar off their records."

After a few months of guitar lessons, Svetkey started a band. He recalled, "We never had a name. And we never had any gigs. In fact, we always played in the cellar."

Svetkey persevered. He carved out a career as a folksinger-songwriter, writing about the everyday joys and disappointments of the smalltown life.

"I cultivated an area of songs about growing up in places like Franklin, about people who want to leave and people who never get out," he said. "It was a very rich vein. I was shooting for what Bruce Springsteen does."

Svetkey's songs, like "Dead End Streets," which the band played in Cleveland, convey the poignance and impermanence of small town life. Some of the lyrics are:

"My old house is for sale once more. For the fourth time in 10 years.

"The sign on the lawn is a sign of the time. It's a sign the neighbors look at and swear.

"Last year, the happy loving couple moved in. This year the happy loving couple just yells, 'Next year the market will be better,' they say, 'Next year it's going to get colder than hell.'"

Svetkey spent much of the 1990s on tour, driving to Midwest gigs alone or with a fellow musician like Pendleton, playing in clubs, coffeehouses and colleges. He estimates he put over 200,000 miles on the Toyota that carried him from Boston into the heartland and parts of the South.

Svetkey's touring years resulted in three solo albums, "Take A Breath," (2004), "yeahyeahyeah," (1994) and "This is Now" (1992).

"We had a blast doing all those things. You're constantly on the road. You're in a musical zone. Everything becomes a potential song," Svetkey said. "I met so many people who informed my life from being a smalltown, perpetually angst-driven guy. It altered the way I looked at being a musician. It fostered a sense of community that was really eye-opening."

Born in Chicago, Pendleton had moved to Boston and was playing guitar in The Amazing Mud Shark when he met Svetkey in a Harvard Square club.

"Jon has the ability to write a song that tells a story that pulls the audience in," he said.

Pendleton remembered the "excitement of going on tour, the new places and new people."

"We stayed in hotels, in colleges, on peoples' couches. We were always meeting people and sharing music. It was always an adventure," said the 39-year-old Medford resident.

And while Pendleton flew to Cleveland with his wife Amy this time, he described the Hall of Fame appearance as "a great pilgrimage for a rock 'n' roll musician."

"It was my third visit to the Hall but my first time to play there. It took things to the next level. It was just incredible. I don't care if we won or lost. It's about putting on a great show. We played in the Hall of Fame," he said.

Svetkey's musical career changed in 1999 when he married folksinger Heather Quay whom he met at an open mic at the Old Vienna Kaffee Haus in Westborough. She has been performing with Lyn O'Connor in the folk duet Quay and O'Connor since 1981.

They have two children, Ian, 2, and Claire, almost 1.

While The Loomers have been playing mostly in the Boston area, Svetkey believes the trip to Cleveland "reinvigorated my interest in putting more music into my life."

Making their first major road trip, Svetkey, Quay and the children drove to Cleveland together, eating at roadside restaurants and watching the landscape whizz by.

The children haven't yet grasped the iconic status of their father's Hall of Fame appearance.

On the ride there, Ian, who is intrigued by numbers, wanted to hear a Paul McCartney album because it has 18 songs. Once in the Hall, he was fascinated by the escalators, his mother said.

"It was a different kind of a road trip," Quay said. "But it was great to see Jon on stage at the Hall of Fame."

The essentials:

For more information about The Loomers or to order their albums, visit their Web site, [www.loomers.com](http://www.loomers.com).

For more information about PARTNERS + simons, visit the Web site, [www.partnersandsimons.com](http://www.partnersandsimons.com).

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