

“What Else Can I Do?": Jesse Malin, April 22 at the Redstone Room

Written by Jeff Ignatius

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Over the past few years, Jesse Malin found himself displaced, although not exactly because of the economy.

Now 42, Malin has lived in the (literal) spotlight since he was 13, fronting the hardcore band Heart Attack in the early 1980s and then the glam band D Generation throughout the '90s before going solo. It might have been a midlife crisis, but after three well-received solo albums and seven years of touring behind them, Malin wasn't sure that music was his proper path, he said.

"Somehow, after the third record, I found myself doing a covers record [in 2008], and then going off on some weird tours in the States, and back in New York, and I was kind of confused what the next thing to do was," he said in a phone interview last week. "I was laying around, I was trying to think what else I could do for a living."

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Some of this was undoubtedly financial. Although he's been in music for nearly three decades, it's been an album-to-album existence. "I found myself living on my sister's couch, hanging out back down at the Bowery, DJ-ing at a club, taking the bus with old ladies," he said. "Where's this money coming from? The covers record really didn't pay much publishing, because I didn't write on it. I was just starving for something. ... I'm broke, and I've got nothing else to say. What else can I do?"

Malin has found his way back to music -- his vital *Love It to Life* album with his new band the St. Marks Social will be released April 27, and he'll be performing at the Redstone Room on April 22 -- but over two years he experimented outside of music. He tried his hand at stand-up comedy, DJ-ed some weddings in Las Vegas, conducted interviews for a documentary on Bad Brains, and supervised music for a documentary on the legendary club CBGB. (There's also an unreleased album by ATM, featuring Malin, pal Ryan Adams, and Johnny T. Yerington, who previously, collectively, somewhat secretly released a punk record as The Finger.)

The DJ-ing was odd enough, he said -- somebody who has made his living on the fringes of popular music was asked to play "Thong Song" -- but Malin said doing stand-up in New Jersey was the strangest. "Mostly my life story," he said of his act. "It's like that thing from [*The*] *King of Comedy*

, Rupert Pupkin, Robert De Niro in that Scorsese film. ... There's the Woody Allen quote that tragedy plus time is comedy. I went to a high school where they're running a male prostitution ring out of the school. I was mugged when I was 11 on 42nd Street, Times Square, trying to go to a hooker. I got arrested after playing Madison Square Garden opening for Kiss, and my childhood dream was to play Madison Square Garden and play with Kiss. Got arrested for having an open container. ... I told stories about being suspended from school for playing drums with my penis on the desk. ...

"I don't think they got it."

Malin said doing stand-up isn't that different from performing music -- but without the safety net of songs if the stories bomb. "There's a lot of rhythm to it," he said of stand-up. "There's similarities in that way."

Lest you think that Malin's tales of youthful indiscretion are relics, consider the project that pushed him back into music: He was asked to write some songs for a documentary on the reclusive author J.D. Salinger.

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So Malin re-read *Catcher in the Rye* and did the type of research that one might expect. He also did the type of research that one might expect of *Malin*. "I went up to Cornish New Hampshire and I climbed over the fence," he recalled. "I tried to go by the guy's house and try to see him or get some kind of information or catch a glimpse As I was on his property, the cops came"

Malin said he was petrified. "Real scared," he said. "I've been in jail in New York City. ... People are scared of the city; I'm more scared of the sticks." And he didn't even get to see Salinger, let alone talk with him. (The author has since died.)

What saved Malin from being arrested, he said, was a [YouTube clip of him and Bruce Springsteen singing "Broken Radio,"](#) from Malin's 2007 record *Glitter in the Gutter*. "I guess they somehow gave me a Get Out of Jail Free card ... ," he said.

Malin ended up writing five songs for the documentary (called *Salinger* and due out this year), and two of those -- "The Archer" and "Lonely at Heart" -- made it onto *Love It to Life*.

The album has the rough energy of punk applied to straightforward guitar-based rock music, with the poise and confidence of a veteran performer -- heartfelt and earnest without ever being soft. (Think Springsteen through the Hold Steady.) Malin called it "a personal historic record" of New York City, "a bottle-up of being home for two years and not knowing what was going to happen next, not knowing if I should continue on with music. ... The story's told through guitars and microphones."

Earlier this year, Malin and Springsteen performed "Broken Radio" live for the first time, at a benefit concert. And Malin suggested that he knows that he belongs in public, performing his

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songs. "Making records is ... the great thing," he said. "But the idea of doing it in front of people is important. ... It's almost like some kind of cleansing AA meeting. To speak it and see if it holds true in front of a bunch of other people."

Jesse Malin & the St. Marks Social will perform on Thursday, April 22, at the Redstone Room (129 Main Street in Davenport). Tickets are \$6. For more information, visit RedstoneRoom.com

For more information on Malin, visit JesseMalin.com or MySpace.com/jessemalin.