

Written by Jeff Ignatius  
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The venerable Chicago band The Sea & Cake will release its 10th album in September. Singer/guitarist/songwriter Sam Prekop told me it will be called *Runner*. And ... well, that's about all he offered initially.

"I haven't actually listened to it," he said in a phone interview last week, promoting his July 21 RIBCO show with The Sea & Cake bandmate Archer Prewitt. "It's like a really fond memory already. I'm like: Why listen to it and attempt to take it apart?"

Prekop said he's in the "recovery period" for the album – the time between when it's finished and when he and the band need to learn the songs for live presentation and to prepare a new show. He said that at first he dreads reworking the songs for concerts, comparing the process to how most people feel about (and procrastinate with) taxes and homework.

But something with deeper roots could be contributing to his ambivalence about The Sea & Cake. The long-running outfit – which the All Music Guide called "the elder statesmen of impressionistic indie rock" – might just be inherently frustrating to Prekop's admittedly "restless" nature.

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“I think we might have to wield a radically new palette to get us somewhere else,” he told TinyMixtapes.com in 2010.

“We can’t ... repeat what we have done,” he said to the *Chicago Tribune* last year. “If we felt like we couldn’t come up with something different, we’d stop.” And: “We still have a great record in us and we haven’t done it. ... One day we are going to make a great record.”

Put simply, reinvention is easier as a single person than as a band, and Prekop is clearly most fond of his 2010 solo record *Old Punch Card*, on which he ditched the pop of his first two solo records and *The Sea & Cake* in favor of a noisy, atmospheric cut-up album.

“I just like it more,” he said. “I think that one for me is such an alien palette,” involving “tossing out most things I knew.”

As a result, he said, he actually *listens* to that record. “There’s no *Sea & Cake* on my iPod,” he said. “If a track [from *Old Punch Card*] came up on my iTunes, I would let it play. Whereas a *Sea & Cake* song, I would probably skip it.”

To be clear, this is probably a passing phase more than a hardened distaste for *The Sea & Cake*. Prekop said that come fall, he’ll likely be excited about playing from *Runner* and the band’s catalog.

And, he said, people who have listened to *Runner* say it’s yet another expansion of the band’s range. “The few people that have heard it feel that it’s really quite different,” Prekop said. “I don’t know that I could vouch for that. It’s quite possible.”

He said that fast on the heels of last year’s 33-minute *The Moonlight Butterfly*, *Runner* features “broader strokes in a way. Sort of things we’ve done before but more intensely” – at times more rock-oriented and at other more ambient. He noted intricate harmonies with acoustic guitar and voice only – something the band hadn’t tried before.

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“A lot of it felt really radically new to me while I was doing it,” he said. “In retrospect, at the end I’m always somewhat – not disappointed, but things don’t quite hold up as well. It’s not that they don’t hold up as well; it depends on when you talk to me. ...

“I’m quite restless in terms of working and wanting to always move on and change things up. I felt while I was making this record ... I had really hit upon some new stuff – for us, anyway. I doubt anybody would term it radical in the realm of all other music.”

And here it’s important to note perhaps one of the biggest – and most obvious – obstacles blocking full renewal for The Sea & Cake: singing. “I don’t think I’d be interested in hearing me unlearn how I don’t know how to sing anyway,” Prekop said.

As for his upcoming show with Prewitt, Prekop said the centerpiece is drawn from his soundtrack for the movie *Pavilion* – which is similar in instrumentation to *Old Punch Card*, but more melodic and with some singing.

Beyond that, the show will feature songs from Prekop’s two pre-*Old Punch Card* solo albums and some from The Sea & Cake. “It’s nice to expose the working parts to some Sea & Cake songs,” he said. “You just hear the guitar and vocals differently ... .”

And without the remainder of the band – bassist Eric Claridge and drummer John McEntire – the dynamic changes. “It’s much more walking the tightrope,” he said. “It’s definitely the most challenging live situation, but in exchange the most rewarding when it really comes off. ...

“Just the very exposed nature of two guitars and me singing adds up to a whole different feel. ... I feel we take more chances in a way. We’re not really improvising, but there’s more of a chance element involved.”

*Sam Prekop & Archer Prewitt will perform on Saturday, July 21, at RIBCO (1815 Second Avenue in Rock Island). The 9 p.m. show also features The Multiple Cat and Seth Knappen.*

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*Advance tickets ( [RIBCO.com](http://RIBCO.com) ) and at-the-door admission are \$10.*