

Lincoln-native finds Sweet success

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"So, now I feel lucky to have the people working who are working, so all has worked out for the best."

During this time, Sweet was constantly recording demos. Sweet said nearly 160 songs were demoed for "In Reverse." One of the demos that made it onto the record, "Write Your Own Song," was about the record industry turmoil.

"It really came out early during the time I had off before I made this record. There was a ton of pressure throughout the industry on artists to only produce the song that the people needed to get on the radio. It was a lot of commercial pressure. More than I've ever felt it before. On some day, I sort of snapped and wrote this snide little song," he said, laughing.

"I'm telling you, I never got so fast a call back from my publisher and my manager on a tape of songs as the tape that one was on," he said, chuckling. "They were quaking in their boots like I hated them or something. And I felt like the song also worked as a metaphor on

another level — like a relationship thing, sort of like 'Go Your Own Way.' I think of it in my mind as dedicated to all of my fellow artists who have listened to all of the shit they say to us, trying to make us be like everyone else."

In early 1999, Sweet began recording "In Reverse" in the studio with three co-producers: Jim Scott (who is best known for his work on Tom Petty's "Last Dance With Mary Jane"), Fred Maher (who co-produced "Girlfriend") and Greg Leisz (who has played on many of Sweet's records).

Sweet said despite the many cooks in the kitchen, things went very well.

"It was the greatest. It was planned to be this team of my friends. Each of them had things to offer me," he said. "We had this understanding that I would be able to take from each of them whatever I needed. Nobody had an agenda of what it should be."

The album was a dramatic shift from "Girlfriend." That album was a very dry and crisp record in a time filled with heavy reverb. While today's rock has moved back to the sound Sweet had during the "Girlfriend" days,

"In Reverse" moves back to the Phil Spector "wall-of-sound" reverb and Beach Boys-style harmonies.

"I've been thinking about using a lot of reverb for a long time. With this (record), I made one batch of demos that had a ton of reverb, where I was trying to create that Spector large-group sort of thing, and that batch sort of set up that sound on the record," Sweet said.

"I wanted it really to be more exotic. I wanted to be ambitious and psychedelic. I really wanted the record to be special and have a lot to it."

"You live half your life in one direction. Then for the second half, you go in reverse, back to where you started — understand the way you felt about life in the beginning."

"It's kind of a strange thing to be saying, but that's sort of how I was thinking about it. I think a lot of people see the title and think it means retro, old-style rock, and that's not what it's supposed to be, but you know, whatever."

"Titles are so hard to explain," Sweet said. "Oftentimes, it's as much

about the sound of it, the feel of it. It just seemed like the right title to me."

Sweet mapped out much of the album in his demos, but major changes still occurred. "In Reverse" merges four of the songs, "Day In the Sun," "Even From My Eyes," "Hole In the Clouds" and "Thunderstorm," into one massive epic that closes out the album.

At the beginning of his career, Sweet was a little uncomfortable with the intimacy of fame, but he's come to terms with that. He said the levels of separation no longer bother him.

"It's really touching to me that someone could hear what I felt and they feel that too. That's the amazing thing about music — when you capture an emotion."

For the next year, Sweet said he would focus on promoting the new album.

"I have a really strong attachment to it personally. I really want to see it find its way in the world as best as it can. We'll stay out touring. I'm just focused on trying to keep my career going, so I'll just keep writing and make another record before too long."

'In Reverse' a gem in world of pop music

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that merits being called "Untitled," as the chorus of the song is "Don't let me go on/Untitled."

There isn't a bad song in the bunch, from the opening blast of "Millennium Blues" to the four-song-in-one finale "Thunderstorm."

Even the snappy retort "Write Your Own Song" is accessible and witty.

Sweet's also gotten more adventurous, more gutsy and more willing to experiment. "In Reverse" possesses moments of emptiness that are welcomed, not wasted. These are marks of a maturing artist, and Sweet should encourage these tendencies.

"In Reverse" is one of the best albums of the year, a moment of musical mastery captured for fine listening. Anyone who likes pop music in the slightest should own this record.

— Cliff Hicks

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