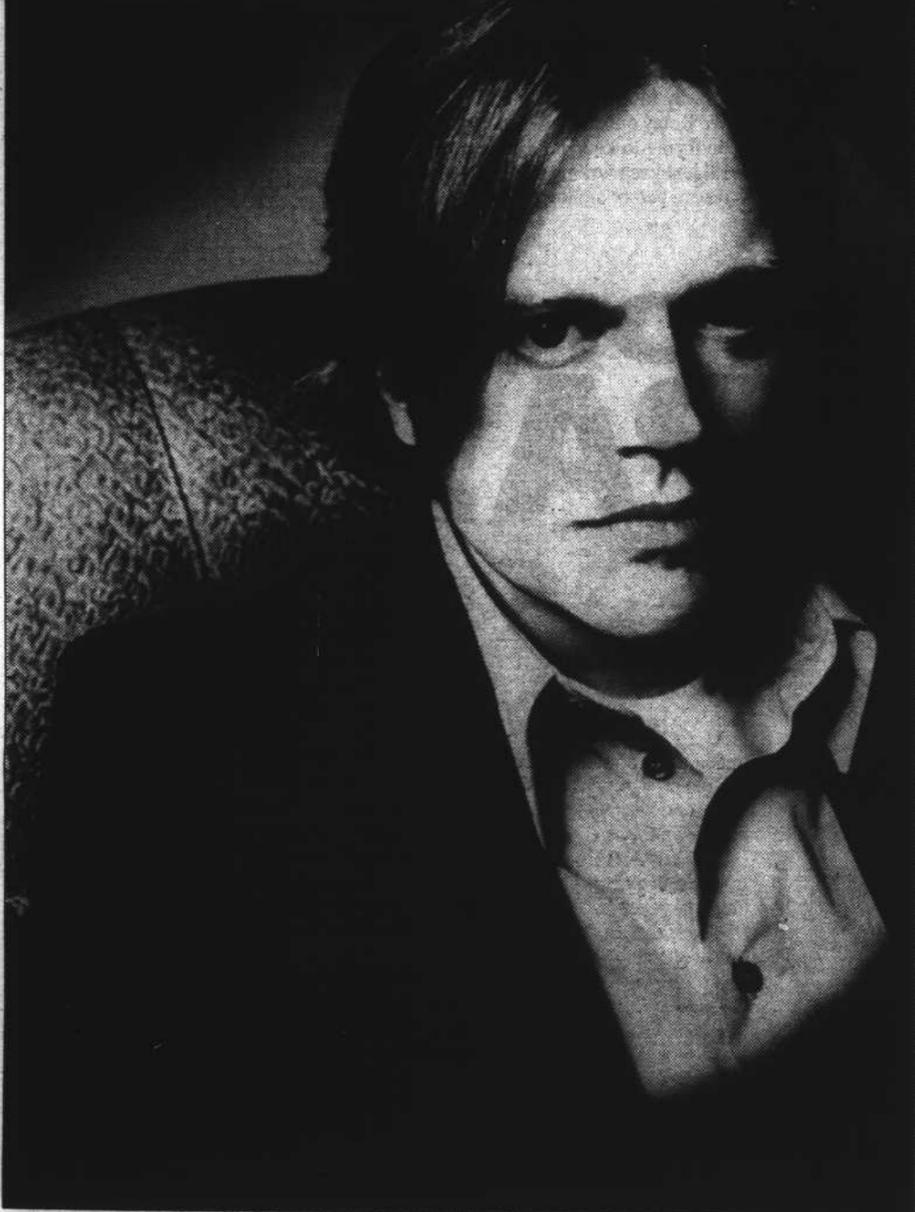


IN REVERSE



COURTESY PHOTOS

Matthew Sweet released his newest album, "In Reverse," on Oct. 12 to positive reviews. Rolling Stone named Sweet's third album, "Girlfriend," one of "The Essential Recordings of the '90s."

Sweet success follows Lincoln-native musician

By CLIFF HICKS  
Staff writer

Even though he's sold millions of records, played to sold-out concerts for years — both across America and overseas — and made one of what Rolling Stone called "The Essential Recordings of the '90s," power-pop musician Matthew Sweet retains that most admirable of traits — humbleness.

"I don't feel ever like it's a given I'll get to make a record," the Lincoln native said in a telephone interview.

"With this record, more than ever, I feel like I'm lucky to be in making a record. For artists like me, right now, it's a really tough time," he said. "And a lot of them are seen making albums that are really good that aren't even coming out, because of the state of the industry, the pressure on things commercially, how narrow radio has become."

During the telephone interview, Sweet was a pleasure to talk to, gracious and amiable. He laughed several times, especially when a noon wake-up call to his hotel room gave us pause at the beginning of the conversation.

Sweet's most recent album, "In Reverse," was released Oct. 12 to overwhelmingly positive reviews. In some ways, the album marks a turning point for his career, which at one point looked as if it might never get off the ground.

Matthew Sweet began his career as a musician in Lincoln, where he grew up. Playing guitar in high school, he would eventually move to Athens, Ga., enroll in the University of Athens and join Oh-OK, a band formed by Lynda Stipe, sister to Michael Stipe of R.E.M.

From there, Sweet left with David Pierce, Oh-OK's drummer, and formed Buzz of Delight. The band cut a record that caught the attention of Columbia Records, for whom Sweet recorded his first solo record, "Inside," which was released in 1986. Sweet also moved from Athens to New York. Despite generally positive reviews, "Inside" didn't catch the ears of listeners, and Columbia let Sweet go.

A&M Records picked up Sweet, and he recorded his second album "Earth," which was released in 1989. Again, the record failed to do well, and Sweet was sent off in search of another record label.

Upon hearing the demo tape for his third record, the president of Zoo Entertainment signed him personally, and Sweet moved to Los Angeles. It was this 1991 album, his third, that would catch the attention of America. It was called "Girlfriend."

The album, recorded with a live band, was the first time Sweet used other musicians heavily. Sweet played most of "Inside" and "Earth" himself. But on "Girlfriend," guitarists Richard Lloyd and Robert Quine added pyrotechnical guitars, Greg Leisz brought in soft slide guitars, and Ric Menck held down the beats with solid drums.

In the spring of 1992, "Girlfriend" became a bonafide hit. The first single, "Divine Intervention," did moderately well. But it was the title track (which had originally been named "Goodfriend") that took off, supported by a flashy video that mixed footage of Sweet with Japanese animation from "Space Adventurer Cobra."

Eight years after its release, while Sweet was in the midst of recording "In Reverse," "Girlfriend" was named by Rolling Stone as one of "The Essential Recordings of the '90s." Alternative Press magazine had named it in its "Top 100 of the '90s" late last year. These reviews pleased Sweet but didn't intimidate him.

"I was really happy that someone cared to put it in such stature," Sweet said, "but I wouldn't say I felt pressure because of it."

After a long tour, Sweet finally returned home and went back into the studio not long after.

"There's a lot of angst in 'Altered Beast,'" Sweet said. "I had a lot of turmoil in my feelings during that time. I was really overwhelmed with what went on for 'Girlfriend.' I wasn't expecting it. I wasn't very prepared for it. My life really changed pretty dramatically at that time."

"Altered Beast" ... I was really venting. I didn't have any time off. I came off the road, and I was in the studio three weeks later to make that record, so it was very much a product of me at that time."

The album had moderate success with two modern rock hits, "The Ugly Truth" and "Time



"I wanted it really to be more exotic. I wanted to be ambitious and PSYCHEDELIC." matthew sweet

Capsule," and Sweet went back out on tour again. In 1994, Sweet released an EP called "Son of Altered Beast" that included live tracks as well as a few remixes and B-sides. It was mainly intended to serve as a stop-gap until the next record came out.

"100% Fun," released in 1995, once again gained Sweet solid reviews and popular record play. This album, Sweet's first with producer Brendan O'Brien, captured Sweet's blistering power-pop rock well. The singles "Sick of Myself" and "We're The Same" both did moderately well, and Sweet played both a solo tour and opened for Soul Asylum.

On his next album, the 1997 "Blue Sky On Mars," Sweet made a major change. He parted ways with Lloyd and Quine and played almost all the instruments himself. O'Brien again produced.

"I mainly change just to do something different each time," Sweet said. "I've tried not to use exactly the same group of people every time."

"It's kind of like you can't win, y'know? If I made every record with Richard Lloyd or Quine, then everyone would say 'Oh, he's always the same,' and when I don't, they complain I don't have them. It's hard to win with that, but I've always tried to do what I felt like doing and weather whatever everyone else says," he said with a laugh.

Regardless of the reason, "Blue Sky On Mars" did not do as well commercially as his past three records. That, added to the tumultuous times of the record industry, did not make for a great break for Sweet. Sweet's label Zoo Entertainment became Volcano as much of the industry went through giant shifts, mergers and heavy artist layoffs.

"I spent about a year trying to get out of the contract, and we didn't want to be in a situation where it was a brand new label and a fledgling sort of thing," Sweet said. "But by the time we were making the record for (Volcano), we were glad that it was them, because of just the way that the record industry had become. To be on a big label for me right now — this record could easily not get the kind of care it needs to find its way onto the radio and out into the world."

New Releases



Matthew Sweet  
"In Reverse"  
Volcano Entertainment  
Grade: A

The wind has changed for Matthew Sweet.

For eight years he has produced good records that have never quite been able to escape the shadow of his titan record "Girlfriend."

But, like all things, this too did pass.

Enter "In Reverse."

After laboring for eight long years to supersede

"Girlfriend," "In Reverse" finally succeeds. Sweet fans, rejoice.

"In Reverse" is a record that marks a significant shift in Sweet's direction. The dry, crisp sounds of records past are jettisoned for bellowing sounds of reverb and echo and walls of wet-textured acoustics.

As a whole, the album is a diverse blend of 1950s Phil Spector, '60s Beach Boys harmonies, '70s psychedelia and Sweet's own sharp songwriting abilities.

Much of the psychedelic touches come from reverse guitars, reverse horns and pedal steel guitars, but the focus of the album is where it belongs — on the songs.

In many ways, Sweet's last album, "Blue Sky On Mars," was a slight misstep. It was short and lacking the flashy lead guitars usually accompa-

nying Sweet's fine songs.

Sweet isn't the greatest guitarist in the world, but this is no insult. His gifts merely lie elsewhere, so the decision to gain a new lead guitarist (in this case Pete Phillips) was a wise one, and Phillips holds his end of the bargain up in a legacy of great guitarists.

Also coming back to the fold is Greg Leisz, who plays the reverse guitars and co-produces.

But it all boils down to the songs. Oh, the lovely songs.

The album offers a little of something for everyone: soft ballads ("Worse To Live" and "If Time Permits"), hard rockers ("Split Personality" and "Write Your Own Song") and flowing epics (the 9½-minute "Thunderstorm").

Sweet also gets a few points for writing a good song

Please see IN on 10

Please see SWEET on 10