

# John's career on the up and up

■ The songs of John Harley Weston reflect his life philosophy, that the past offers lessons for the future, hope never dies and reward comes from resilience.

**Michael Jacobson** meets an artist on the verge of a new frontier

**H**is self-deprecating humour is never far away, a quality common among Scots in general and John Harley Weston in particular.

It allows the Glasgow-born singer-songwriter to maintain a sense of reality about the fickle nature of his chosen field – music – one that melds industry and art, passion and pragmatism, exhilaration one day and exasperation the next.

“There’s no doubt that music can be a demanding mistress and you have to have a strong sense of self-worth,” he says. “You know what we musicians are like, vulnerable and easily offended, so you need a strong reserve of resilience to tap into when things are tough.”

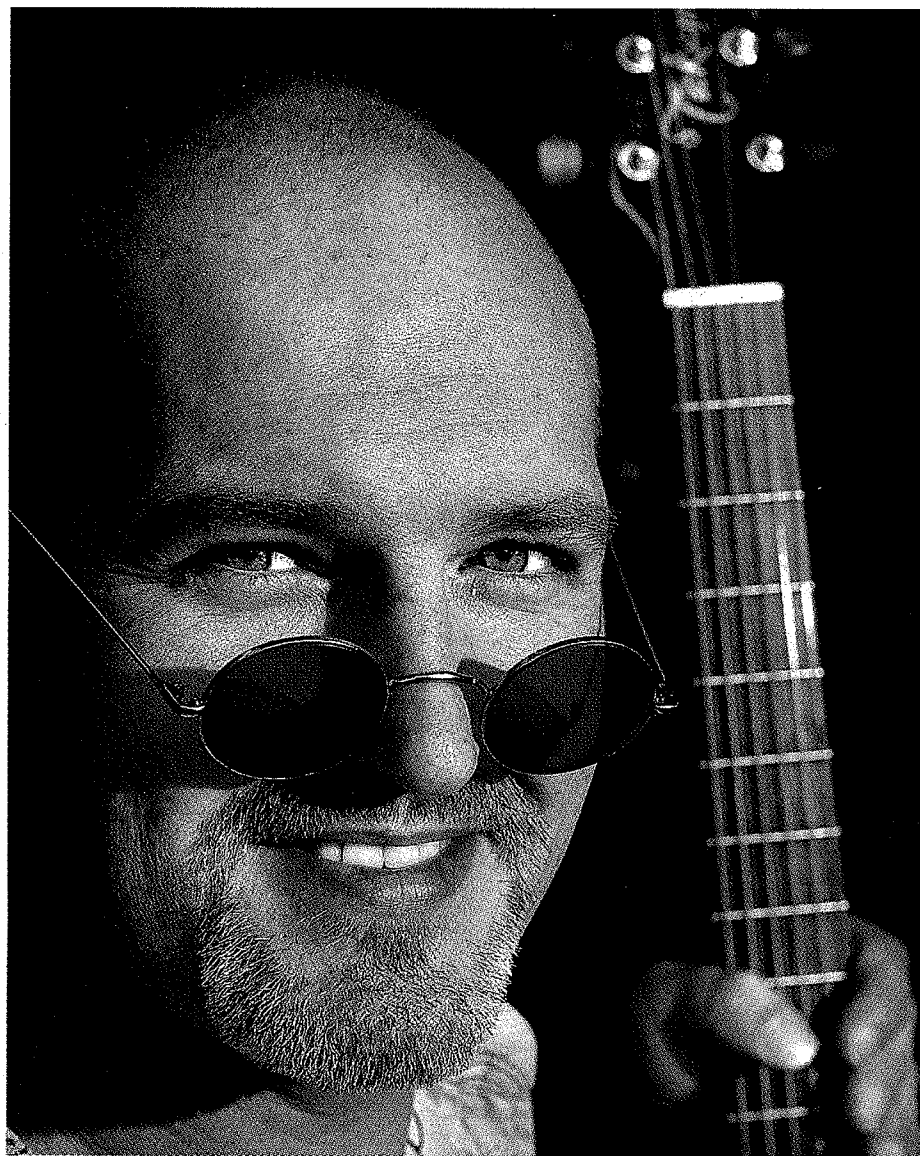
Of course, surviving tougher times makes the good times all the more rewarding, and Weston’s career seems poised for very good times indeed.

Having won the rock category of the 2005 Australian National Songwriting Contest with his song *Last Days of Summer*, it and another track, *Brothers and Sisters*, have advanced to the next round of judging for the 2005 International Songwriting Contest. Renowned as being difficult to crack, the Nashville-based competition attracted more than 15,000 entries. Judges will announce winners next month.

The Weston tracks in contention are from the album *Hope Harbour*, a collection of distinctive melodies and socially aware lyrics from an artist accurately described as possessing the subtlety of Ben Harper and Van Morrison and the style and delivery of Paul Rodgers, Paul Weller and John Mellencamp.

Before leaving Scotland nine years ago for a new life on the Gold Coast with Tasmanian-born wife Susan, Weston had worked with some of music’s most influential operators, including Steely Dan producer Gary Katz and members of Paul McCartney’s band.

He first tasted success in the early ’90s as lead singer and co-writer with Scottish band Frontier, playing hundreds of live



shows from outdoor festivals and pubs to universities and even Wembley Arena. Frontier supported acts such as Wet Wet Wet and as a soloist Weston supported acts including Duran Duran, Indigo Girls and the Lighthouse Family.

However, the commercial success enjoyed by those acts eluded Frontier. Despite being signed to the Polygram label, recording one album and preparing

**Singer-songwriter John Harley Weston ... ‘there’s no doubt that music can be a demanding mistress’**

to record a follow-up, the band was dropped and the album was never released.

“It was just one of those things that happens,” reflects Weston. “It’s like having the carpet pulled out from beneath your feet and you feel as if you’ve been sent back to behind scratch.”

“But what can you do? You can’t just give up and stop writing or playing. If music is a part of you, you can’t deny it. You pick yourself up and go again.”

In Weston’s case ‘away’ meant 16,513 clicks from the UK, and for the past year he, Susan and daughter Mackenzie have called North Tamborine home.

“I’d never thought of coming to Australia until I met Susan. She was a whirlwind,” says Weston. “I was 30 when I arrived, fearless and jobless. I was immediately struck by that great ‘give it a try’ mentality that exists in Australia. I came here to live a little and the truth is that experience feeds songwriting. Australia was a big adventure and I think the Scots and Aussies share a sense of adventure.”

It didn’t take long for Weston’s immersion into Australian life to result in an expanding collection of new songs.

Among them, in 1999 he wrote and released *The Road To Victory* for the Brisbane Lions AFL team. Then in 2004 he released *Hope Harbour*, the 13 songs on which ring with positivity and poignancy. His themes are universal and include global unity, the struggle for inner and outer peace, the importance of family and the need to reflect on and learn from the past in order to fashion a better, wiser future.

“My wife tells me I’d be much better off if I could just write a decent love song, but I’m compelled to write about the causes I believe in,” says Weston.

Understandably chuffed at recently scoring an endorsement deal with guitar company Takamine, whose other artists include Jon Bon Jovi, Bruce Springsteen, Troy Cassar-Daley, Linkin Park, Simple Plan, the Eagles and Garth Brooks, Weston is combining live work, preparations for a new album and family life.

“The next album will be more acoustic, something in the Ben Harper and Jack Johnson vein. Australia is in a great position for that kind of music, that blend of melody and message.”

John Harley Weston performs at Harley’s Restaurant, Hope Island, between noon-4pm on Saturday, March 4 and March 11, and the Bearded Dragon, Mt Tamborine, on March 26.

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