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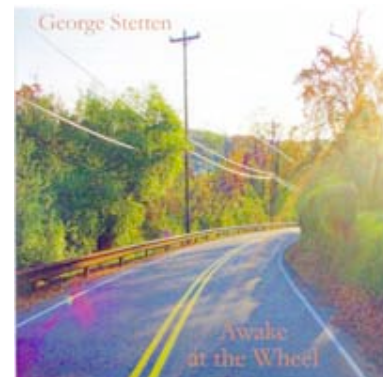
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## George Stetten, musician

One "essential" interest (as he calls it) that George Stetten wishes he had more time to pursue is music. As a kid, he dreamed of growing up to be a rock star. He studied classical piano for 12 years before deciding that he preferred pop music. "You couldn't exactly sit down at a party, start playing Beethoven and get a girlfriend," Stetten told the American Society for Engineering Education publication PRISM last year.



Stetten even traces his interest in electrical engineering back to fixing broken microphone cables as a fledging musician.

Stetten spent a year in a master's program at the New England Conservatory, was house pianist at a hippie seaside café in the early 1980s, played at the Philadelphia Folk Festival with folk musician Bill Staines in 1983 and appeared solo in the PBS-TV series, "All American Jazz," in 1989. The PBS radio program, "All Things Considered," occasionally uses a snippet of Stetten's piano playing as segue music.

In 1997, Stetten founded the Duke University Music Exchange (DUME) and produced their first CD, "Voices of DUME," to promote popular music by students and faculty. Stetten hopes to create a small studio in Benedum Hall where Pitt engineering students could learn about recording technology, eventually making their services available to musicians from throughout the University.

"There are a lot of technical aspects to popular music that our students could learn, that are actually saleable skills: music recording, synthesis, production," he says.

To capitalize on students' love of pop music, Stetten once taught a Pitt graduate bioengineering course in which students learned electronics by inventing new musical instruments. One student came up with a "balloon bassoon" that inflated and deflated; another invented a "grimace guitar," the sounds of which were shaped by the player's facial expressions.

"I'm hoping to do that course again," Stetten says, "maybe with new software that would allow students to both compose and record the music they produce."

Stetten released his own first CD, "Awake at the Wheel," a couple of years ago, featuring 10 original songs recorded at his home studio in Fox Chapel. He plays piano and guitar, programmed the drum samples and sings with backup from his wife and two teenaged daughters. Stetten even did the CD's artwork, including a front-cover photo taken outside his family's home.

The music itself mixes folk, rock and jazz and reflects Stetten's influences: James Taylor, Joni Mitchell, Carole King and Cat Stevens, among others. The instrumentation is spare ("I didn't exactly have the option of using a horn section," Stetten quips), the lyrics thoughtful.

Stetten's favorite song on the CD is called "Pittsburgh," a catchy but rather melancholy ode to the adopted city he calls "a great place to live but you wouldn't want to visit there," echoing the local joke.

Stetten, who plans to release a second CD of original music soon, says ruefully that he has sold just under 50 copies of "Awake at the Wheel" so far through cdbaby.com, an online retailer of independent CDs. But he still dreams of retiring as a musician some day, living on royalty checks.

"It would be nice to get paid for what you did yesterday rather than what you have to do today," Stetten says, with a grin, "don't you think?"  
—Bruce Steele