

## Left brain day job:

Research scientist George Stetten shows his musical side

Some might say that science and music don't mix, but George Stetten would disagree. The 49-year-old research scientist at Carnegie Mellon's Robotics Institute is the inventor of the Sonic Flashlight, but perhaps more impressively, he filled every role in the production of his album, *Awake at the Wheel*.

This isn't Stetten's first version of *Awake*, and it won't be his last. He's on version 1.02 of the album, producing it on his home computer using a Macintosh-based recording system. He goes through a process of recording, listening to the recording, and then editing the recording that he calls "painting with your eyes open." In addition to recording and producing, he wrote the songs, sang them, and performed all the instruments, including the piano, guitar, bass, and drums. The only help he needed was a few back up vocals from his wife and two daughters.

He's proud to mention that the album's cover art and all the lyrics are original creations. His lyrics are strongly poetic and capable of standing on their own. They're showcased in the vocals with low-key piano and unobtrusive guitar and bass making for a mellow, acoustic-rock feel. Think Counting Crows with a piano and James Taylor on vocals with a slow Dylan or Neil Young rhythmic pace.

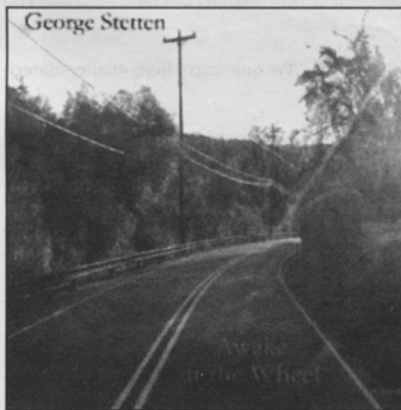
When writing the title track of the album, he struggled for a month to find a line to rhyme with "staying awake at the wheel" until Bob Dylan's voice came through his head with the answer: "what is this ache that I feel."

One of his favorite original songs, "Pittsburgh," gives a short melodic description of the city, its rivers and its history with the steel industry, and echoes a refrain, "Old Pittsburgh has her ups and downs."

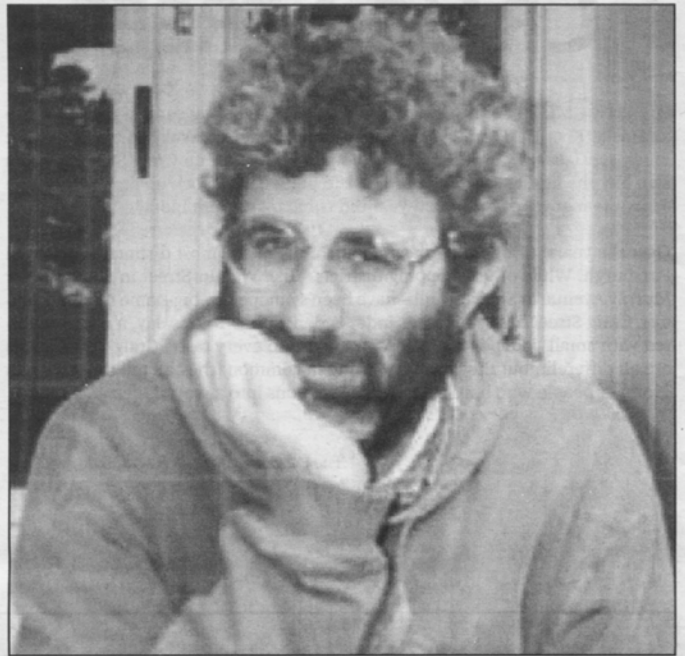
Stetten draws most of his influences from the early '70s. He'll mention James Taylor, Cream, Jackson Browne, and the Grateful Dead's Jerry Garcia, to whom he bears a slight resemblance. He's been in groups that have covered songs from all of these bands at one time or another, but it might be hard to imagine Stetten rocking out to Cream after hearing him lay out smooth jazz-based chord progressions on the piano in *Awake*.

At one time, Stetten played clubs, but these days you'll find him shying away from the lifestyle of the professional musician, content to record at home. He distributes homemade CDs, selling them on his personal website (Stetten.com) and on cdbaby.com.

"In the long run, it might be nice to get paid, but let's first see if anyone else wants to listen to [my album]."



Courtesy of George Stetten



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With that sentiment in mind, Stetten offers free mp3s on his site. What else will you find there? Lyrics and sheet music to his songs, and *Weisenbaum's Eye* (a science-fiction novel he wrote in the late '70s about cyberspace).

You might be tempted to think that this singer/songwriter and author is all right brain, but when you mention his name you're more likely to hear about his most successful invention, the Sonic Flashlight. This ingenious device projects a real time ultrasound image of a section of a patient onto that section of the patient. He holds positions at Pitt's Biomedical Engineering department and Carnegie Mellon's Robotics Institute. On top of that, he has earned an M.D. from SUNY-Syracuse, an engineering degree from Harvard, a PhD in biomedical engineering from Duke, and a master's degree in neuroscience from NYU. He also spent a year at the New England Music Conservatory.

Stetten reminds us that music is a system of differences with rhythms and patterns completely dependent on math and science. And which is more important: his music or his science? Stetten answers, "I kept the day job."

For now, music is his hobby, recording at home and selling CDs when he can. He just got a new drum set and is thinking about inviting some friends over for Sunday morning jam sessions.