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Tuesday, April 5, 2011

## Peter Mayer's Retrospective

*A reminder of local songwriting excellence*

By [Brian Baker](#)



Over the past 30 years, Peter Mayer has created an impressive body of music within the Cincinnati scene but has hardly enjoyed the rewards or reputation as his similarly vintaged peer group. He's succeeded on his own terms but he wouldn't mind a touch of recognition for his labors.

"If I don't see some kind of result, it doesn't give me much impetus to do something," Mayer says over drinks at Glendale's Friendly Stop. "Then I talked my wife into getting a

basement room remodeled with a 32-track digital recorder because it's cheaper than therapy. Maybe, maybe not."

Mayer has since assembled songs from his lengthy career, added three brand new tracks (where the versatile guitarist plays everything) and titled the home-produced project *Collection*. A sonic scrapbook of Mayer's oldest, most recent and clearly best work, *Collection* has had an inspirational effect on the songwriter.



"If anybody's interested, give me a call, I'll play," Mayer says. "Getting a band together is a lot of work, but if there's any kind of groundswell ... we'll see."

Mayer's first generation German family relocated from suburban Detroit to Finneytown when he was 12. He learned guitar on his own as a teenager, attended UC and investigated the local music scene.

"I started writing in 1980, sort of by accident," Mayer says. "Friends were recording at Group Effort and I thought, 'That would be cool ... I could do something.' The main hook of 'Made in America,' from *Album Project 6* (part of Rock radio juggernaut WEBN's old local music compilation series) was going through my head so I wrote it on a napkin. I worked it out and said, 'Wow, maybe I could do this.' I'd never been in a recording studio before but right away I felt at home."

Mayer wrote songs and assembled bands for two Album Projects; 1982's "Risqué Rene" received plenty of airplay (the original version closes out *Collection*). In '83, Mayer formed The Shadows, an energetic Pop band, followed in '85 by the visceral New Wave outfit that should have punched some tickets, the exquisitely talented Drumbones.

"This guy Alan Siegel had a book, *How to Make It in the Music Business* — obviously I didn't read it too well — so we sent him a tape as a lark," Mayer recalls. "I get this call ... 'This is Alan Siegel. We want to meet you guys.' We formed the band in Brooklyn. We were up all night, punching each other ... 'We're gonna kick everybody's ass, we're gonna be so great.' We didn't even have a practice space."

Drumbones released an excellent five-song cassette and was tagged as a potential next big thing, but with drummer Bob Blackwood's departure, the band lost momentum and dissolved a year later. Mayer rebooted with Big Pictures, which morphed into Hoi Polloi in 1990. Mayer also became an assistant engineer at Real Pro Workshops, which allowed him to record his own stuff, inspiring a fertile writing period.

Mayer revived Big Pictures with Greg Renzenbrink, released a CD in 1993 (a second, semi-official CD, *The Downwinders*, came later) and they began playing out again, opening for The Tubes, Brian Setzer and Spirit, among others. A second-shift position with WXIX monkey-wrenched Mayer's schedule but he persevered.

By the new millennium, Mayer had entered four 97Xposure competitions at WOXY, with Drumbones and Big Pictures. His last entry, "It's Just the Energy," won in 2001; by then, he was playing and recording everything himself.

"I recorded 'It's Just the Energy' and 'Suspicious' in the early 2000s, and that was the last recording until the past year, when I did 'Long, Long Way to Go,' 'Where My House Used to Stand' and 'Song for Ry,'" Mayer says. "I'd kept writing and recording mini-cassettes. Last December, I put in the digital studio and figured, 'What the hell, everybody else is putting out a CD.' I had taken graphics (classes) at Cincinnati State in the early 2000s, and that's what I do as a side business, so I designed it, printed it, duped it and put it out."

*Collection* could spark Mayer's resurgence. Available at Shake It, Everybody's, CD Baby and iTunes and getting regular airplay on Class X Radio's *Kindred Sanction* show, *Collection* is a fascinating compendium of Mayer's best-recorded work, while the new songs are ringing updates of the bittersweet Beat Pop that Mayer has always championed. He's never really stopped performing, sitting in on drums for friends and playing in a sporadic acoustic duo with

Renzenbrink, and he has a substantial video presence on YouTube. Mayer wouldn't be averse to putting together another electric band, but the clock is ticking.

"I just had a Dutch online magazine give me (an) 8 out of 10 (review) and I was just contacted by a British magazine and they like it," Mayer says. "Oddly enough, I have a new song that I haven't recorded yet, but will, called 'The Last Hurrah,' like this is it. If nothing comes of this, I'm done."

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**PETER MAYER ([www.petermayermusic.net](http://www.petermayermusic.net)) performs at Allyn's Tuesday.**

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Pete so glad to see this, it's well deserved! Drumbones was one of my very favorite bands back in the day...glad you haven't stopped.



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