

Local Folksinger Hits All the Right Notes

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He has a day job handling public relations for the Consortium for Energy Efficiency, a Boston non-profit. But at night, Howie Newman can often be found in local coffeehouses strumming his acoustic guitar. The 55-year-old performer writes and sings good-natured, folksy songs about cell phones, Boston drivers and getting up in the morning.

The likeable entertainer, whose zippy and upbeat tunes have tinges of folk, rock, bluegrass, jazz and country, has just come out with a full-length CD entitled "Trust Me, You'll Like It." It contains 13 original compositions, including "Drivin' in Boston is Drivin' Me to Drink," "Big in Belgium," and "Please Buy My Record."

Newman, who did all the arrangements himself and recorded the material at a studio in Bedford, is marketing the disc under his own label, Major League Records. Free downloads of several songs can be found on his website at www.entertomusic.com/newman.

"I had a lot of fun making this CD, and I'm very happy with the way it came out," says Newman, who worked with a lot of other Jewish musicians including Duke Levine (guitar, mandola), Billy Novick (clarinet, sax), Janet Feld (vocals) and his own 19-year-old daughter Jennifer (vocals).

This is not Newman's first recording. In 2001, he released "Here We Go Again" containing seven signature songs. He has also put out a collection of baseball-related tunes, "Baseball's Greatest Hits," which was accepted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame Archive in 2002.

Songs about sports figure prominently in Newman's repertoire. The first song he ever released, "Blasted in the Bleachers," is a parody about drinking at Fenway Park. Newman insists it is not autobiographical.



Singer-songwriter Howie Newman

An avid Red Sox fan, Newman faithfully attends the first and last games of each season, as well as many in between. He has written several songs about his favorite Bosox players.

In his newest baseball tune, "Why Did You Go, Johnny Damon?" Newman laments the loss of Red Sox centerfielder Johnny Damon to the Yankees. The song has been played on WEEI, a local sports talk radio station. Newman also penned an ode to former Sox first baseman Doug Mientkiewicz "because he found the name fun to pronounce."

Before getting involved in public relations, Newman spent 18 years as a sportswriter for the Patriot Ledger, the Lowell Sun, the Boston Globe, the Associated Press and the Lynn Daily Item. In that capacity, he covered two World Series, five NBA Finals and four Stanley Cup finals.

Although he says the job was fun, he had to work a lot of nights and

weekends, which precluded him from playing music.

Newman's new CD and upcoming performance schedule represent a return to the spotlight after a nearly two-decade hiatus, during which he took time off to be with his wife Ellen, and two (now grown) children, Jennifer and Keith.

"I worked full-time as a musician from 1973-1983," explains Newman, who has opened for Tom Paxton and Vance Gilbert. "I was on the road a lot, and wound up playing in a lot of smoky bars where people weren't listening."

Bantering with the audience is a big part of Newman's solo act, and he says he "didn't want to be background music." Now, Newman plays where he wants — mostly small venues that are more intimate — where audiences come specifically to hear his music and laugh at his jokes.

"I'm not trying to make a living off this," says Newman, who plays several gigs per month. "I just want to have fun."

Newman says the music industry has changed significantly since he began his musical career three decades ago. "Recording a demo is no longer a novelty," admits Newman, who believes technology has been both a blessing and a curse.

"You can cut your own CD, but the radio stations are swamped with homemade demos so it's hard to get your music aired."

Howie Newman opens for folksinger Bill Staines at Memorial Hall, 590 Main St. in Melrose on Fri., Sept. 15. For tickets, call 781-979-4185. He will also co-host an open mike the third Thursday of each month at the same venue, beginning Sept. 21.