



POKEY LAFARGE

“Limiting myself to a genre has never really been my thing,” says Pokey LaFarge. “I’m most purely a rambler. I’m traveling the world all the time, and my songs have been directly influenced by my travels. You’re liable to hear something in my songs that sounds like traditional jazz; next thing you know, you might be hearing something that sounds like Bob Dylan’s *Nashville Skyline* mixed with the *chanson* singers of France, or a waltz mixed with cumbia, or soul mixed with swing.”

Ever since his first record, 2006’s self-released *Marmalade*, LaFarge has been a difficult specimen to pin down, indeed. Though he was raised on a healthy diet of blues, bluegrass, ragtime, Western swing and old-time country — and though he has consistently demonstrated a decided affinity for pre-1950s menswear — the Illinois native is by no means a throwback or a museum piece. Timelessness, and refined good taste, is LaFarge’s *raison d’être*, and his influences are as multi-hued and wide-ranging as the rhythms that buoy his starkly poetic songs — rhythms that are steeped in the very essence of jazz.

“With me, lyrics are the most important thing,” he explains. “But when it comes to music, it’s just as much about the groove — something about the groove that makes me want to *move*, you know? There’s always a little bit of swing to it, something that’s got a bounce. I mean, people have been swinging for hundreds of years!”

LaFarge’s deft way with words and music — as showcased on such dynamite discs as 2008’s *Beat, Move and Shake*, 2010’s *Riverboat Soul*, 2011’s *Middle of Everywhere*, and 2015’s *Something in the Water* — has won him raves from critics, and inspired a devoted following on both sides of the Atlantic. Jack White, recognizing LaFarge as a kindred spirit, asked him to sing and play mandolin on White’s 2012 album *Blunderbuss*, took LaFarge and his band the South City Three out on tour as a supporting act, and signed him to Third Man Records for 2013’s *Pokey LaFarge* LP. LaFarge also performed the White-penned “Red’s Theater of the Absurd” in a saloon scene in Gore Verbinski’s 2013 film *The Lone Ranger*, an appearance which eventually led to landing the recurring role of country legend Hank Snow in CMT’s 2017 series *Sun Records*. LaFarge has played big stages like the Ryman, Red Rocks and Bonnaroo, but he’s equally at home ripping it up in any small theater, nightclub or roadhouse that’ll have him.

With each of his albums, up to and including 2017’s critically acclaimed *Manic Revelations*, LaFarge has evolved and reinvented himself as an artist, preferring to continually refine his sound and tinker with his approach instead of resting comfortably in one spot. “Early on, I was into leaving things open to interpretation,” he says. “It was like me solo, performing as if I was a full band. Or it was me and three other guys — the South City Three — all string



instruments, performing as if we had a horn section. And then I *got* the horn section and the drums, and everything was so loud and all the space was filled, that I had to dial it back. Maybe it's hard for the fans to keep up sometimes, but my favorite composers are the ones that you can't describe what their music is, and every single record is different from the one that preceded it."