

# arts

## The wonder of one thing at a time

The jazz guitarist and singer likes to narrow his focus — and thank the Red Sox

### JOHN PIZZARELLI

**e** Thursday, Dec. 4, 9:30 p.m.

Newport Blues Cafe, 286 Thames St., Newport

Tickets \$28

(401) 841-5510

www.newportblues.com

BY MATT KEEFER

Over the phone, John Pizzarelli comes off as warm as the lasagna he's cooking for his sister during the pre-Thanksgiving holiday. I'm wondering to myself whether they'll cook a turkey a couple days from now, but that's hardly the point; the 48-year-old singer/guitarist's music comes off a bit more chill and laid-back than the meal he's cooking up, with a style that borrows from Chet Baker and Django Reinhardt. I asked him about his other musical influences.

"Nat King Cole is the main (one); everything that Nat did was really what I wanted (to do). Everything I loved about music was in Nat's music:

there was a sense of humor at times, there was great jazz, the vocal singing was impeccable, and I loved the songs," he says.

So much so he cut two albums of the singer's famous songbook: "Dear Mr. Cole" and "PS Mr. Cole." His latest is a Richard Rodgers' showcase, "With a Song in my Heart," which includes "It's Easy to Remember" and "The Lady is a Tramp." It will be part of Pizzarelli's set list for his Thursday, Dec. 4, performance at the Newport Blues Cafe, which will also include bossa nova and the Beatles. Pizzarelli likes to focus his albums on one particular artist because, he says, "I think it just gives the record more of a direction. I like the idea of centering on one particular thing and exploring it."

The last time Pizzarelli performed in Rhode Island was in 2006 for the opening night of the JVC Jazz Festival-Newport at the Newport Casino where he and his father and guitarist Bucky Pizzarelli performed a tribute to Frank Sinatra. The return to the Ocean State finds



**Round and round he goes.** He's more a Nat King Cole than Dean Martin kinda guy, anyway. PHOTO BY TIMOTHY WHITE

him in a much tighter position, literally speaking. I warned Pizzarelli that he might not fit a drum set and piano on stage, "Oh, that's OK. We've been in those kinds of places before. It's fun, we're into it."

Pizzarelli is of course well known for singing Foxwoods Casino's theme song "The Wonder of it All" (written by Joey Levine) and making it annoyingly famous. He says he finds his work "accessible to anybody who likes music. We have a lot of jazz, we have a pop sense... it's a little bit of every generation."

But even if his set should fall short, Pizzarelli has a strong backup plan: talk about the Red Sox. I mentioned something about a CD credit to Jacoby Ellsbury. "I thank a Red Sox player on all my records, because I'm a Red Sox fan." For this upcoming performance, he more than willingly picked out a name.

"I think it's time to thank (second-baseman) Dustin (Pedroia). In past years, the guys I thanked have been traded. I thanked Johnny Damon on one of the records, and he got traded the next (album). Every once in a while, I thank someone and he gets traded, but this year I got lucky."

In the interest of journalistic completion, I should just mention the following two items: that I might have mentioned something about maybe one day thanking as of now untested Red Sox prospect Portsmouth's Ryan Westmoreland. Also, that I am certain the lasagna came out well.

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