

# Why we write so much about John Legend

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COMMENTARY



Every few weeks, an e-mail or phone call will wander into our newsroom

along these lines:

"Why do you guys write so much about John Legend? He's not the only person ever to make it big from Springfield."

The sentiment comes so often that we have a stock response: Rest-assured, the next person from Springfield who wins six Grammys, we promise to write a ton about them, too.

But it's a legitimate question. Why do we write so much about John Legend?

The easy answer is: because we can. He's a popular musician who approaches his craft like a CEO launches a new product. He is one of the world's best at what he does. He appears to be intelligent, hard-working, successful and — one would hope — having a great time doing it. Have you seen his girlfriend?

In the time around the release of his fourth album, he played Grand Central Station in New York, sang the National Anthem at Game 1 of the World Series, was part of promotions by American Airlines and Marriott Hotels, appeared with Bill Gates as part of the promotional tour for the documentary "Waiting for Superman," and performed live on TV, radio and in concerts in Britain and throughout the U.S.

This is since September. The man is busy. Reporter Andy McGinn was able to get him on the phone for all of about 10 minutes last month for our



John Legend at the VHI Save the Music Foundation Gala on Nov. 8 in New York. AP Images for VHI photo by Evan Agostini

article about his new album. And we have his cell phone number and know his parents!

When he returned to Springfield for the fifth reunion of his North High School graduating class, he was already an Ivy League graduate working on Wall Street. He would have been barely drinking age since he graduated from high school at 16.

At the reunion, the story goes, a bunch of folks went out to a bar. Legend — still John Stephens at the time — told friends that Wall Street was fun and all, but he was about to try something new. He was going to try music. He'd give it three years. If it didn't go well, he could always go back to Wall Street.

We should all have such choices — a life of jet-set swinging with supermodels, or the mundane acquisition of millions. Ho hum.

But fame and fortune do not equal success; working hard to fulfill a dream for your own life equals success. He appears to be successful.

I understand some of our callers who ask us, "Why do you

write so much about John Legend?" His music is not for everyone. Folks who don't like R&B have little interest in his creative work. Some don't like Barack Obama, and because Legend has penned anthems in support of the president they grumpily harp on him. Fine. Sad, but fine. Some, I think, are motivated by race.

But some of the calls come from envy. Why, they seem to ask, write so much about someone who left?

He's not the best that Springfield has to offer. Springfield has produced many fine people — some moved away; others live here.

But he is an example of where talent and energy and creativity can take you. God forbid a young person should look away from his or her own troubles and be inspired by someone who grew up in the same Midwest town.

Who knows what the future holds? The music industry is brutal — no one makes money selling albums anymore and the most successful musicians have to parlay recorded music into more profitable concerts and promotional work. He has started his own record label, but none of his acts yet have reached anywhere near his success.

For every day that John Legend spends in the sun, John Stephens — CEO of John Legend Inc. — has to figure out new ways to keep the business afloat. That's a fascinating story. It's one many people are interested in, or he may fail.

That's why we write so much about John Legend.

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