



Jack Johnson, but Jack Johnson just doesn't deserve the love.

Sure, he's handsome. Inoffensive as a golden retriever. It's even been said that he lives in a tree house, or is building a tree house, or something about Jack Johnson and a damn tree house. Who can blame him for that? If you'd sold 7.5 million CDs over the course of six years, you'd build an awesome tree house, too.

Others say Jack Johnson's three-chord-and-nothing-more whimsy pays tribute to the great bluesmen, with all that repetitive talk of trains and women and getting kicked while you're down. Well, fine. But those redundancies are sung over guitar arrangements so compressed and impotent they make Jimmy Buffet seem gritty.

The problem with Jack Johnson is this: He lacks the essential ingredient to good songwriting, the perennially important male trait that *Esquire* magazine might call "gravitas." I've seen bar mitzvah bands with more chutzpah. The guy can rock a hot-tub party, but only if it involves Fat Tire ale, swim trunks, and children. His latest hit—from the *Curious George* soundtrack!—is mere background music for an awesome game of Marco Polo, or, at its rowdiest, the soundtrack to the championship bash of the Fort Collins ultimate Frisbee team.

Of course, we all know that Jack Johnson isn't the first to record adult-alternative in a jar and then release it into the waiting area of your local Olive Garden. Witness Hootie, the Counting Crows, and that clammy bastion of Olestra-fueled rock, Dave Matthews. So, why pick on Jack Johnson? Good for him if he's making loads of money, the cover of *Outside* magazine, and sustainable tree houses—right? Wrong.

Many years ago, rocker Ted Nugent told me that if he were left in a Brazilian jungle he'd be running the place in no time. "I'd be king in a week," he proclaimed. "I'd build a house outta dead shit." That's pretty gross. But if forced to choose, I'd rather hang with The Nuge in an Amazonian dung-shack than with Jack Johnson in his sustainable tree house high atop whatever island he probably bought, like, at least five years before *Men's Journal* wrote about it and totally ruined it for the locals. Sheesh! Sure, The Nuge and his brain-rattling guitar solos would be tough to handle. But at least the guy has chutzpah. At least he has gravitas. At least he's not Jack Johnson.

—Mike Kessler

You Don't Know Jack

Colorado's favorite soft rocker Jack Johnson may be fighting for the environment. But his music is just noise pollution in disguise.

WE RECENTLY RECEIVED a press release that really put the shine on our day. It was a memo from Colorado-based environmental group Rock the Earth announcing that Jack Johnson, the former pro surfer turned beloved pop singer, was a recipient of the organization's Planet Defender Award, namely for his contributions to the Surfrider Foundation. What a joy to hear! We commend Jack Johnson for exploiting his fame in the name of a cleaner, greener Earth.

But let's put ecological altruism aside for a moment and train our lens on Jack Johnson, bard of the six-string, darling of KBCO, singer of songs. You hear his breathy falsetto while grazing the fair-trade coffee aisle at Whole Foods. He's on the cover of every adventure magazine on your coffee table. His songs play on most stations with a transmitter over 20 watts. He's as ubiquitous as Colorado sunshine, Jack Johnson, but he shouldn't be. Why do people buy into it? And not just the moms in Crocs clinging to their girls-kissing-girls Smith College days. We're talking the entire music-listening public. Everyone loves