



Interview: Jeremy Porter & The Tucos [f](#) [t](#) [g+](#)
on tour again with 'Contagious'

By: Peter Roche | AXS Contributor | Jun 22, 2018 | 3 hours ago

Jeremy Porter's been rocking Michigan's Upper Peninsula for a quarter-century now, having founded (or fronted) hard-hitting punk / rock groups like The Regulars, The Off Ramps, and SlugBug in the '90s and early '00s. The guitar hero also recorded a solo album, *Party of One*, before he started searching for new musical conspirators.

Now [Porter](#) is three LPs (and several 7"ers) deep with his Detroit-based trio, [The Tucos](#).

Named for Eli Wallach's bumbling bandit in 1966 Clint Eastwood classic *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly*, Jeremy Porter and The Tucos issued their mission statement in 2013 with [Partner in Crime](#). With 2015's [Above the Sweet Tea Line](#), they doubled-down on their Stones-esque roadhouse rock and bluesy ballads.

2017's [Don't Worry, It's Not Contagious](#) is the group's first release on GTG Records. Powered by the sizzling Southern guitar gristle of single "Huckleberry," the disc boasts more of Porter's alt / indie-rock panache ("Worth the Wait"), country-flavored fury ("Consolation Prize"), and melancholy folk-rock ("Urge to Cry")—and drummer Gabe Doman and bassist Patrick "Two Shoes" O'Harris' rugged rhythms.

We chatted with Porter via email this week about *Contagious* and about [The Tucos'](#) upcoming tour—which will land them at the legendary [Grog Shop](#) in Cleveland Heights next [Thursday, June 28](#), with Duo Decibel System and Dutch Babies ([click for tickets](#)). You can check out the new songs on [iTunes](#) or [Amazon](#), and scan their [tour itinerary for gigs](#) near you via their [website](#).

AXS: When did the writing process start for the new album? Where was it recorded?

JEREMY PORTER: I started writing the record around the time we wrapped up recording [Above the Sweet Tea Line](#), so it was mid-2015-ish I guess. We recorded in Spring of 2017 at The Loft in Saline, which is a converted hayloft on a horse farm in rural Michigan, south of Ann Arbor.

AXS: Seems like you're always on the road...do you do most of the writing there?

JP: I don't write on the road. It's just something that's never worked for me. Any downtime we get is spent fixing guitars, cleaning out merch bins, refining set lists, or watching bad movies. I am, however, constantly making mental notes on things that grab me as potential ideas for lyrics or titles or subjects. Things people say, situations we find ourselves in. I write alone, at home, with an acoustic guitar, usually get the chords, melody and lyrics recorded onto my phone, then when I get time I'll record a proper demo in Pro Tools. From there I'll sit on it for a bit, see if it sticks or if it's not worth pursuing, and if it makes my cut I'll take it to the boys for the next step. Sometimes they help with the writing, but they always help with arrangement and feel. Sometimes we collectively agree that the song just isn't working.

AXS: What kinds of guitars / amps did you use on the album (and live)? You have a nice mix of twangy Tele-sounding stuff and heavy, crunchy classic / hard rock

JP: Thanks! That's all a part of our little identity crisis I guess. My main rig is a Matchless Chieftain 98 head, and I'll run that through a variety of cabs. On this record, I used an Avatar 1x12 a lot, with a Celestion Alnico in it. Gabe has a nice Music Man and a couple great Mesas that we use a lot too. The Mesas are used a lot on the rock stuff, and the Matchless is used a lot on the twangier stuff, but we'll often mic both and mix them together for a nice thick sound. My road guitars are Reverend PA1s—the Pete Anderson signature models—and those are all over the record, but there's plenty of Teles, Les Pauls, a Danelectro Baritone, Gibson and Guild acoustics. More than I can remember! Pat has a great Strat that we used a bit too. Between the studio, Gabriel, Pat, and I, we have an incredible arsenal of gear at our disposal, and we take advantage of that.

AXS: Tell me about “Patty's Not Impressed.” Seems like it's about some smart-aleck friend who has an opinion about everything. I think most of us know someone like that!

JP: Hahaha! Oh he's gonna love that! Patty is our bassist, Patrick O' Harris, and he's an opinionated guy, and he likes to talk a lot, so we're constantly hearing about what he likes and doesn't like and why. He's the polar opposite of Gabe in that way, in that Gabe is a quieter guy who really only speaks up when he's got something specific to say. The narrative that's in Patty's head is something we have come to love about him, and it was just ripe for the picking as far as lyrics go. A lot of people don't realize it's about him. I've heard that it's about a waitress, an ex-girlfriend. It's so funny! I'm trying to talk him into doing a video for it.

AXS: Is it harder writing the slower, more serious songs like “Torn” and “Urge to Cry” than the fast rockers?

JP: I'm not sure I would say that it's harder. “Torn” was written after a particularly depressing show at the end of a tour in West Virginia, and it was probably written in less than an hour. It pretty much wrote itself in one sitting. “Urge to Cry” took a bit longer. It's more conventional as far as chords and arrangement go, so it took us longer to find a good feel to set it apart, and that song continues to find its legs on stage. I think it's a bit fast on the record. Songwriting, in general, is pretty easy for me, in that songs come fairly easily, but that's not to say that

everything I write is good. Separating the crap from the good stuff, then editing it into a good arrangement is the part of the craft that I (or we) tend to spend the most time on. That can also involve re-writes of lyrics or parts. I think that's where the real work happens.

AXS: What's the traveling situation like for the group? Is it a grind, or are there things / hobbies / activities that can help alleviate the stress / slog?

JP: It's a bit of both. We do a lot of shows, but we focus on Thursday through Saturday shows and rarely play weeknight shows. It's a mentality and methodology that is more and more common for bands. So we're usually gone for four days at a time, sometimes longer, and pretty constant in the spring and fall, but less in the summer and winter. When we have shorter drives and we get more downtime it's always easier on the body and mind, but the longer drives tend to be more of a grind. Fairly typical I guess, but we're lucky in that we have a nice van and usually stay in ok hotels or AirBBs. We are each into good food too, so we rarely do the fast-food thing. When we're not eating at the venue we'll search out good local places and that helps to keep it interesting too.

AXS: Do you still photograph the lavatories at the venues? How'd that start?

JP: Oh yeah! That started a few years back when I was playing a solo show at the Corktown Tavern in Detroit, and I was taking a leak and just looking at the graffiti and stickers and grime in the men's room and it seemed so rock and roll that I felt compelled to document it, so I snapped a pic, posted it to social media, and got a hell of a reaction. So, just like a little kid who gets a reaction to something, I did it again, and again. It kinda just became my thing. People seem to dig it. I actually have a coffee table book called "Rock and Roll Restrooms – A Photographic Memoir Vol. 1 – A unique look into the seedy underbelly of small time rock and roll." I did a couple pressings of a hardcover and softcover prototype, and they sold out quickly, but it's hard to do it by myself. I really need a publisher. So if you or any of your readers know anyone, let's talk! Check out www.rockandrollrestrooms.com. You can also find them on Instagram under #rockandrollrestrooms and/or my feed at @onetogive.

AXS: You've played [Beachland](#), [Happy Dog](#), and a couple other joints in Cleveland, but you mentioned you'd been trying to get into [Grog](#) for a while.

JP: It's one of those iconic American clubs that you always hear about. It's always the stop after or before Detroit. When you see those clubs on the back of a shirt or a favorite band's itinerary, it sticks with you after a while. And those are the clubs I want to play! We love the [Beachland](#). The Tucos played the Tavern a couple years back and I played the big room about 10 years ago with a Clash-cover side project band. [The Grog Shop](#) has been on my list for years. This is our first time back to Cleveland since the last album. Besides just being thrilled to be at The Grog Shop, we're really excited to play with our pals Dutch Babies, who we met at Now That's Class many years ago. They're kinda like a post-punk rock band with a great stage presence and great guitars. Gina is their singer and she's a darling, and watching their set is a treat. Duo Decibel System are another great band we've played with—at Happy Dog, I think. Melanie is a great

front-person, a bit more rootsy than the Dutch Babies, but still a bit of a punk approach, great songs and good people. It's going to be super fun! It's Gina's birthday, and it's gonna be an earlier show so don't go worrying about them Friday morning alarm clocks folks!