



The Rock

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Winter's Song

Jeremy Porter's first band was *The Regulars*, one of the UP's first punk rock bands, seen here circa 1986.

Honest Rock

Porter takes aim at pandemic with 'Candy Coated Cannonball'

By Kevin Brown



Jeremy Porter and the Tucos are ready for new adventures on the road, as soon as Covid-19 takes an off-ramp.

"Candy Coated Cannonball" is the new record from the Detroit Music Awards-nominated power-pop band. It is led by Porter, a veteran Plymouth roots-rock singer-songwriter-guitarist. The 11-song LP was recorded just prior to the pandemic. In January, it was released digitally and on vinyl and CD.

Key songs include the fun and catchy "Dead Ringer".

"She's a dead ringer for a pop singer I fell in love with on a record sleeve."

Jeremy Porter and the Tucos songs would fit on a playlist with Tom Petty, Green Day and Foo Fighters. The band also has an alt-country bent, as Porter loves him some Gram Parsons and Merle Haggard.

"Take the hooks from your favorite Cheap Trick record, the dark humor from a Tom Waits ballad, and soak it in a puddle of beer next to Paul Westerberg's amp and you might have something resembling a description of Jeremy's sound," a Nashville, TN reviewer once wrote. "For those who still appreciate honest rock, this is one of America's best examples of pure talent and hard work," wrote *Jersey Beat*. The name Tucos comes from Eli Wallach's character in "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly."

ORIGIN STORY

Bassist Bob Moulton's initiation to the band came at the start of a 2019 tour, at the Preservation Pub in Knoxville, Tennessee. "Mid song, Jeremy leaps off the stage and down into the crowd, launching into a guitar solo without missing a beat. I remember looking back



Jeremy Porter and the Tucos are (from left) Jeremy Porter, Gabriel Doman and Bob Moulton.

at Gabriel (Doman, drums) and holding my breath a bit before smiling. I was relieved he didn't kill himself and was blown away by the solo," Moulton said.

Porter was raised in Alpena. "I grew up in a musical household, my mom played piano and she had an acoustic guitar," he said. When he was grounded all summer after seventh grade – for egging the house of the junior

vice principal – "I got that guitar and haven't put it down since."

It was the early '80s. "My Aunt Lori would babysit, and she had a Who songbook with music. I was already way into KISS, Cheap Trick and The Knack," Porter said. He learned chords and how to play.

The family moved to Marquette in fall 1984. "It was still a small town but a lot

bigger than Alpena. After a few months I met a couple of guys," he said. They formed a band called The Regulars. It was one of the UP's first punk bands, playing the Dead Kennedys, Velvet Underground and The Monkees. Their first show was for a senior party outdoors. "It was terrifying. We had really bad stage fright, and the mosquitoes were terrible. But it was a real PA (sound system) and lights."

Porter moved to Ypsilanti in fall 1988 and earned a B.S. degree from Eastern Michigan University. "I wanted to play in bands and be in the city," he said. He tried out for one named Chutes and Ladders. When the lead singer left soon after, Porter took over the microphone. "From that point on, I've been the lead singer in every band I've been in."

He also discovered the value of songwriting. "I knew if I was ever going to do anything in music it wasn't going to be doing cover songs. I'm pretty fortunate that I write a lot of songs." The Tucos touring cycle begins with Porter writing a new record. "Every couple of years I'll write 30, show the band 20, record about 15 and release about 10. I let the good stuff flow to the top."

NO BUSINESS LIKE SHOW BUSINESS

Hitting the road is a blast. It's also a bore. "I think everyone thinks you're living in a Van Halen video. But it's a lot of work, a lot of waiting to play, and a lot of travel. It's like a Groundhog Day thing," Porter said. The band does roughly 50 shows a year, heading out for long weekends and some two-week tour stretches. Lexington, Kentucky is among the most welcoming. A Bluegrass State crowd fave is Porter's song "Hey Kentucky," with its sing-along ending.

Porter once shared a bill with Green Day. It was at a house party on Grosse Isle, in the early 90s. "It was after their first album; we were really into them. They were super friendly. They smelled horrible," Porter recalled. He played front man Billy Joe Armstrong's guitar at the performance, on the back deck of a house. "We had them open the show. It was in a neighborhood and there was the fear the cops were going to come and close it down."

While Porter and the group have toured throughout the U.S. and Canada, he said a UK tour in October 2018 was special: Nine shows in nine nights, including two in London and one at a festival in Wales. "The last show was in a small town called Workington, way north, just south of the Scotland border. It was a sort of mini fest at this little rock bar. We partied hard into the night with everyone there."



Jeremy Porter during a recording session for "Candy Coated Cannonball" LP. Photo by Bob Moulton

On one tour, Porter shot and posted a photo of a restroom where the band performed. Since, Porter's become known for restroom posts, snapped at successive venues. He's collected them in a book and hopes to find an interested publisher.



Happy bandmates, Porter said, is a key to touring. "You have to be aligned in your commitment and ambitions. They have to be good people." Both Moulton and Doman add harmonies. The band has posted a video of "Dead Ringer" to YouTube to promote the new album. Past video locations have included Kellogg Park, the Plymouth Coffee Bean Co and local pubs.

Porter does the odd solo tour. He topped the bill in 2019 at the Farm City Festival in Danville, Kentucky. It was staged on a goat farm. "It was dark; I could see horns moving," he said.

COPING WITH COVID

After wrapping "Candy Coated Cannonball" in early March, the band played its last live show before the shutdown in March 2020. "We lost over 25 tour dates across the U.S. and Canada in 2020, so it was devastating." Porter kept busy by posting solo videos in response to song requests. The band got into mixing and mastering their new record.

Porter met wife Noreen when he was 19. His day job is managing a web applications team

for an automotive supplier. She works in electronic health care and medical record systems. They have lived in Plymouth 25 years.

"I love being home, hanging with my wife, doing our thing -- listening to records, cooking great food, strumming a guitar on the front porch, and I miss the occasional family or friends get-together, but it's really the lack of playing rock and roll that is killing me," he said. In October, Porter took a week off to hole up in a Wisconsin cabin and write songs for the next record.

LOVING PLYMOUTH

The couple enjoys shopping at Westborn Market, a beer and burger at Stella's Black Dog Tavern, and downtown in general. Porter has another reason for loving the city: "I had a couple packages stolen off my porch. My neighbors saw it, and actually followed the guy in his car and called police. They were there in 90 seconds. That doesn't happen everywhere," he said.

For more information about Jeremy Porter and the Tucos and "Candy Coated Cannonball" visit tucos.com.