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Detroit's Jeremy Porter Talks Michigan Music, Mark Lanegan and More

[Local Music Beat: Jeremy Porter of Detroit's The Tucos talks about the band's upcoming retrospective, remembering Mark Lanegan and more in this edition of the column](#)



The Motor City has a history of cranking out great rock 'n' roll, and Jeremy Porter is continuing that tradition. Porter and his band The Tucos make raw, real rock music that they describe as sounding like "guitars and whiskey, hooks and heartache, energy and passion."

Porter checked in with Audio Ink Radio to discuss his upcoming retrospective, "Jeremy Porter and The Tucos – Bottled Regrets: The First Ten Years," the Michigan music scene and more. Read the full interview below.

Anne Erickson: I really enjoy how you post your tour experiences on Facebook. Tell me about why you like sharing your road experiences with fans.

Jeremy Porter: Thanks, Anne! I appreciate that! It's something I started to do around 2013 when we were on the road and it just seemed like a lot of our friends appreciated hearing the stories about what it's really like out there – the good and the bad. They don't always get a lot of likes or feedback, but I'm continually surprised at how many people tell me in our travels that they read and enjoy them. One guy in West Virginia once told me they are the perfect length to read while, um, doing a No. 2 to paraphrase, which I thought was a sweet thing to say.

I write more formally for a website called Pencil Storm out of Columbus, Ohio, but the road blogs aren't quite as polished – they're usually started late at night in some seedy motel room and finished early the next day with an aching head and an unsteady hand, and not extensively proofread for grammar and typos due to time constraints, but they are a document to what happened the day before and I hope they capture the mood of the trip. I've been working on archiving them and tying them into our past-shows database on our website.

What's it been like getting back on the road, after the pandemic made it not possible for so long?

It's great to be back out there, but it's also a bit weird, for sure. We lost over 25 tour dates to the pandemic and released an album we couldn't support. It was crushing, so to be able to do that again feels so great, and I'm careful to not take it for granted. At the same time, the world isn't entirely ready to move on. People, especially in our age bracket, will take any excuse they can to stay home, and a dangerous and contagious virus is as good an excuse as any I suppose, so it's harder than ever to get people out. But, to loop back, the people who are coming out again are as excited to have live music back as we are. It's been awesome. Whatever anyone's position is on masks and vaccines and venue-mandates, my position is that anything that makes live music viable is worth doing, so besides the general "let's all stay healthy and help each other stay healthy" angle, which is reason enough, we're all for anything that keeps venues open and bands on stages.

You have a gig coming up at PJ's Lager House in Detroit on March 12 with Popular Creeps and Royal Scene. Tell me about what makes this a great bill and what we should expect from the show.

This is a make-up show for a cancellation in December when there was some Covid going around the bar. Lenny from Popular Creeps and I are pals who bond over our mutual love for Cheap Trick and bop around town a bit, and I saw his old band The Leonards in Ann Arbor when I first moved down here in the fall of '88, so that's kind of cool. Royal Scene are some pals from Lansing we've played with up there before, and I know a couple of those guys from their old band The DTs, who my old band SlugBug used to get in trouble with on the streets of East Lansing back in the early '90s. All three bands are your basic heart-on-sleeve, up-tempo, power-poppy, bar-rock with a focus on songwriting and spirit over precision. I love them both and can't wait to watch them before we play! It's also our first local show with our new bassist Jake Riley, and the release weekend of our 10-Year retrospective collection, and our first local headlining show since 2019, so, yeah – lots to celebrate!

I saw that you posted about the passing of Mark Lanegan. Tell me about your experience meeting him and what you think he brought to that era of music.

Yeah, that's a bummer, eh? My meeting with him was very brief and pretty much fan – artist. I was coming from Wyandotte, the first practice of a new band I'd just joined, Chutes & Ladders, and the Screaming Trees were supporting the Meat Puppets at the Blind Pig in Ann Arbor. Because of the practice and the drive we missed them, and I didn't really know much about them, but I knew I'd wished I could have seen them. This was January 1990, so still before the big alternative boom and they weren't as well known as they'd be in a few years. They were all sitting at this table just off the main band room and they seemed so big and hairy, all decked out in flannel, like lumberjacks, and sweaty from the show. I always liked meeting touring bands and knew it was them, and I just apologized to Mark for missing them and had some small talk with them all for a minute. The Meat Puppets killed, and I'd see the Mark Lanegan Band at Small's in 2012 after I really latched onto his "Blues Funeral" record, and it was a great show.

As far as what they brought to that era, I'd say an elevated sense of melody and less of a hoarse, growly vocal style set them apart from those other bands. I think people tend to forget or under-appreciate how great Layne Staley and Kurt Cobain and some of those other grunge-era guys were as vocalists. Cornell gets much-deserved credit, but so many of those bands just had awesome singers, and Lanegan was very different; melodic, smooth, but absolutely belongs in that conversation. I always thought he would have been a much better choice for that (unnecessary) Doors reunion tour than Ian Astbury, much more mysterious, dark, and Morrison-esque.

Congrats on the new retrospective on the way, "Jeremy Porter and The Tucos – Bottled Regrets: The First Ten Years." Tell me about this set and why you wanted to create this collection.

Thanks! It's been in the back of my mind for a couple years. We were going to have a big 10-year show in Detroit to celebrate in 2020, and that couldn't happen. Then I just found myself sitting on all this stuff – these tracks we'd done for compilations, a couple demos of songs we never released or covers we recorded just for shits and giggles, studio outtakes, whatever. And we had these two shows from Toronto that were recorded to tracks and somehow we actually played halfway decent.

Then we did our last record around the time the decade mark came and went, and we parted ways with our bassist, and shows were starting to pick up, and it just seemed like...now's the time to do it, or it ain't gonna happen, ya know? Disc one is a "best of," disc two is "rarities & B-sides," and disc three is live. The live album especially was way more of an undertaking than I'd expected, but I'm so happy it's all going to be out there, and we are starting decade two with a clean plate, a new bass player and a whole bunch of new songs and shows in front of us! We'll do that again in ten years, but I'll try to be a little more pro-active and organized so it's not so cumbersome.

You guys are on bassist No. 4. Tell me about what happened with your previous bassist.

As things started to pick up late last year, Bob decided that the amount of road work we do wasn't something he was up for anymore. We made a record together that we're all proud of, had some laughs and adventures, and came out on the other side still friends, so that's about as good as you could hope.

Jake Riley is a friend from a few years back, he loves the road and loves playing, knows our catalog (better than Gabriel and I do sometimes), plays great, and sings like a bird. We couldn't be happier to have him on board and in the van. We call him The Professor, and sometimes Jake E. Lee (you'll get that, as a metal fan), and we're learning to adjust to him being a vegetarian. Onward and upward, Anne!

What's your favorite memory from those first 10 years as a musician, performing, etc.?

You know, there are so many. Early on with Jason on bass, recording with Tim and Andy Patalan at The Loft in Saline, and for the first time in my life actually enjoying that process, thanks to them. Then all the way forward to last September, 2021, with Bob on bass, opening for Soul Asylum in Detroit, a band I've been a huge fan of since 1985.

But I have to say my favorite memories are just climbing in the van, passing around the iPod, hanging with the boys, watching The Rifleman and Little House reruns at the motel, and of course all the great shows, bands, bar-staff, and other people we've met all over the place. Touring the UK was something I'll never forget, and hope to do again. I'm trying to enjoy the journey and not obsess about the proverbial arrival, and that makes for some happy travels, less agitation, and lasting memories.

You're part of GTG Records. How has being on GTG Records helped your music get to a broader audience over the years, and what do you love about the GTG community?

Well, you kind of answered the question right there – it's a community. All we ever really wanted out of a label was some promotional support, and some sense of camaraderie, family, and togetherness between the label and the bands. Like, no one is getting rich, so let's have some fun and combine forces for the mutual good and make some memories

and get into some trouble, eh? Tommy Plural, GTG Records, The Plurals, and the whole Lansing scene in general have embraced us old Detroiters into their scene and we feel more welcome there than we do in Detroit.

The pandemic was rough on independent music venues across the U.S. You're based in Detroit. Did you lose any favorite venues due to the pandemic? What are your thoughts on Mac's Bar and The Loft closing in Lansing?

The closing of a venue, or a record store, or an independent radio station is always a bummer. I'd never been to The Loft in Lansing, but I loved Mac's. One of our best shows early-on was there. It was a rock dive in every sense, and I was just right next door having a beer at an adjacent restaurant last weekend. It may still come back as some sort of venue, but who knows. Lansing can certainly support another music venue, though they are very fortunate that The Avenue Cafe is doing well.

I loved Three Kings in Denver, Douglas Corner in Nashville, The Mothlight in Asheville, all closed. We had gigs booked at This Ain't Hollywood in Hamilton, Ontario and Cosmic Charlie's in Lexington, Kentucky that were cancelled by Covid, then they closed, so I'll never get to play those great rooms. It's just depressing, but let's hope as things open up the demand will bring new venues and new places to play. I'm really happy that PJ's Lager House, Small's, Outer Limits, and most of the other Detroit/Hamtramck venues have weathered the storm so far.

What are some local, independent bands that you think should be on people's radar throughout Michigan and beyond? Both GTG artists and others.

That's a good question. As mentioned above, The Plurals, Popular Creeps, and Royal Scene are all worthy of attention. A Rueful Noise out of Lansing is a new band that I love. They have a 7-inch single coming out on GTG that I produced over the lockdown and our drummer Gabriel engineered and mixed out of his home studio in December. Ladyship Warship is one of my favorite Detroit bands. I love Alpha Rabbit from New Jersey, The Great Dying from Mississippi, Vibrolas and NP Presley & the CEB from Kentucky, The Stick Arounds from Lansing, The Zimmerman Twins from Toledo, David Picco from Newfoundland, Ned Hill from Nashville... I could talk about under-appreciated great bands all day!

What are your thoughts on the Michigan music scene? Do you think it's strong?

This is always such a hard question. I think the Lansing scene is the strongest in the state. It's diverse and inclusive, welcoming, positive and consistent. They have a bunch of great bands, a reliable venue, a couple labels, some press and radio support, and a couple record stores that are all collectively ingrained into the scene and all work together to make it a positive thing for everyone. It's everything a scene should be, and it's incredibly rare.

Detroit is much more fragmented and cliquey. I love Detroit. I'm proud to be based here. I have great friends. I love the city and the people and the shows we play here, but it just seems like everything is so much more of a fight, which I guess is very "Detroit" in itself. It's not supposed to be friendly or easy to succeed here, I guess? There's tons of bands from Detroit that are incredible, and I love the venues and festivals. I can't get the time of day from half of them, and that's ok too, but inclusive isn't a word I'd use to describe the Detroit music scene. Michigan rules. We fly that flag, and we do what we can to help bands from outside the state who want to play here, but it's a struggle. I find myself always telling them "It's not like where you're from, it's harder to get things done..."

Talk about your "Restrooms" book a bit.

I have a 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've got prototype copies available on soft and hard cover in our web store, and I'm looking for a publisher who can help me get it out there in some real capacity. It's basically a coffee table book of cell-phone photos of the cans in the bars we play all over the U.S. and Canada that I take and share every night. Any publishers out there? Let's talk!

You seem to have an affinity to metal, which we've connected over on our socials. What is your draw to that?

Oh, yeah, I was huge into metal and hard rock as a kid, then stepped back a bit as I got into punk, but never really left, and dove back in deep over the years. It's in my blood. I love the energy of the music and the sense of community in metal, and the dichotomy between serious and cheesy. Now there is an inclusive music scene!

I am into the early British bands like Priest, Maiden, Sabbath, and UFO, as well as bands like Aerosmith, Dio, and KISS. I love the Whitesnake records with John Sykes, the first two Motley Crue records, the first three Def Leppard albums, the earlier Cinderella and W.A.S.P. stuff. Nich from The Plurals turned me on to King Gizzard and the Lizard Wizard, who are a newer and more current band that I now love. I'm also just now diving into the early Skid Row catalog. My wife and I are going to see the Scorpions residency in Vegas in April.

What do the next couple years look like for The Tucos?

We are touring extensively this year, on pace to do 40-50 shows, working on material for album #5 while supporting our Candy Coated Cannonball record and this Ten-Year collection. We've got a song coming out on a Guided by Voices covers comp, a video for the NPR Tiny Desk Concert series, and a seven-inch single on GTG Records in the fall. It is insanely busy, which I love! It's good to be alive and out there making music, Anne! Thanks for the talk and all you do for Michigan Music!

Anne Erickson's column appears regularly in Audio Ink Radio. Have a band or concert to share? Contact her at anne@audioinkradio.com.