

INTERVIEW/PREVIEW

By Pete Roche



three-disc treasure trove of remastered Tuco standards, rarities, B-sides, outtakes, and live tracks (from Toronto 2016-17). It's available now at www.thetucos.com and on most streaming platforms. Their new 7" single, "Tonight is Not the Night," will be on hand at the show (opaque red vinyl!).

We chatted with Jeremy via email this week about The Tucos' ongoing tour, which brings them back to The Happy Dog on Thursday, October 13, for a gig with Cleveland pals Doug McKean (Ohio City Singers, Boys From the County Hell), and Duo Decibel System.

NCV: How did you get started in music? Who (or what) inspired you? Any particular epiphany moment that catalyzed you?

JEREMY PORTER: Growing up there was always a piano and a guitar in the corner. There was always a stack of Beatles, Dylan, and Beach Boys records. My parents encouraged me to love music, and it stuck as I grew up. Around the time I turned 8 or 9, I guess, I started taking guitar lessons and finding my own tastes in music. I loved Kiss, Cheap Trick, The Knack, and then The Who, and I hated school, so rock star seemed the logical choice for a career path. I wanted to be Ace Frehley. That was some pretty good motivation, but hearing "I Want You to Want Me" for the first time, seeing the inside gatefold of KISS Alive II, and watching The Who's farewell (haha) concert on HBO in 1982 all had an impact. Hearing The Clash for the first time a couple years later made it all seem somehow obtainable.

NCV: Any personal favorite singer-songwriters or guitarists?

JEREMY PORTER: Loads of them, really. As far as songwriters, Townsend, Jagger-Richards, Lennon-McCartney early on. More recently Rick Nielsen, the Drive-By Truckers, Jason Isbell. Westerberg, Mould, Weller, Waits are all in there... I like aggressive guitarists like Townsend and Mould, who focus on energy and impact over precision, but I'm also a longtime passionate metal fan, so I studied Randy Rhoads for a while, and I love those metal guys too, even though I could never play like that. Keith Richards is a big influence and got me into open tunings.

NCV: Detroit is Motown, but it's also known for Alice Cooper, Iggy Pop, MC-5, Seger, Nugent, etc. What was the "scene" like when you were growing up, and what was it like once you were part of it?

JEREMY PORTER: Well, I didn't grow up

around here, I moved here when I was 18, right before Ann Arbor became a pretty powerful scene (again). Bands like Laughing Hyenas and Big Chief were making a big splash, and the scene was pretty healthy, especially in Ann Arbor. I struggled to fit in with my more poppy-punk-powerpop type stuff, it wasn't fashionable at all. I wasn't well connected and struggled to make things happen, but over time things have come around. It's taken decades and a lot of indifference and rejection, but I can't really complain about where I am/ we are now.

The scene today is pretty fragmented and cliquey. I've been there for so long that I have tons of friends and we get good shows and are very fortunate in that way, but I still struggle to fit in in a lot of those circles. Compared to some other scenes like Lansing, Michigan and Lexington Kentucky, for example, it's just not as healthy or inclusive. Part of the problem, if you want to call it that, is that we're a road band, so we aren't home playing the social game as much, which doesn't help break into that sphere of acceptance.

NCV: Can you talk a little about some of your earlier groups?

JEREMY PORTER: Sure! My first band was called The Regulars, up in Marquette,

Michigan. We were kids in high school doing punk and garage covers. We weren't great, but we thought we were, and we had a lot of fun, and I have nothing but great memories from those days. Those guys are still among my closest friends. Then I moved to the Detroit/Ann Arbor area and joined a band called Chutes and Ladders and started really working on songwriting. My next band - SlugBug - did some touring and put out some stuff on an indie label out of Chicago and had some major label interest before we fizzled out. Then I was in bands called The OffRamps and Fidyrych that both did some good stuff, but didn't tour much. There's a lot of stuff out there if anyone's interested, and I'm still cool with pretty much everyone I've played with, so I feel really blessed to have that resume and to have been surrounded by all those great people.

NCV: How did Tucos form? Were you always friends, or did that happen as a result of being in the group together (both new and past members)?

JEREMY PORTER: Our first bassist Jason was in Fidyrych and The OffRamps with me and we shared a similar work ethic and had a lot of our record collections in common, not to mention being great friends, so after Fidyrych he was the guy. I'd known Gabriel



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casually, he'd tried out for my Clash-covers project Cashback on guitar, but when Jay and I needed a drummer, he was clearly the guy. Gabe is my right-hand man, we work together really well, and I rely on him to keep me leveled when it comes to songs, arrangements, recording, production, and generally calling out my BS when it needs calling out. Our bass player since late last year is Jake Riley, a guy from Ann Arbor who was already familiar with our catalog and we'd each worked with outside of The Tucos before. He's a great guy and plays and sings great, and just loves getting up there and putting on a show. He's given us a kick in the ass. We're firing on all cylinders at the moment, and it's a lot of fun.

NCV: Last time you played Cleveland Patty was on bass, right?

JEREMY PORTER: Yeah, Patty left a few weeks after we got back from England in late 2018. I think we'd played The Grog Shop that spring, if memory serves. Bob Moulton came on board, who was a friend from the area I'd known for a long time. We did a year's worth of touring with him, wrote, recorded, and released the album, then as we were starting to get back out there on the road after the long lockdown, he decided it wasn't for him anymore. We miss hanging with those guys, and each of the three of them left a big mark on the band, but we're so happy to have Jake - he's picked up all the slack and then some -

and the new songs with his mark on them are coming along fantastic and the next record is gonna be something special!

NCV: My son and I love *The Good The Bad and The Ugly*. I'm guessing the Tucos name came from Eli Wallach's character?

JEREMY PORTER: It did! Thanks for not saying *Breaking Bad* [with drug kingpin Tuco Salamanca]! We needed a name in a hurry and that was available. Naming a band is really hard, for me anyway. I think we coulda done better, but we coulda done worse too. That movie is so great - one of the best ever, and he was a very colorful character. Jason wanted to call us The Mortimers, after the Lee Van Cleef character, but that was taken by a hardcore band from Poland, so that's why we landed on The Tucos.

NCV: I'm familiar with *Sweet Tea Line* and *It's Not Contagious...was Cannonball* a product of pandemic sessions, or had some of the album already been in-process?

JEREMY PORTER: Most of the recording was finished days before the actual pandemic lockdown happened, in early March 2020. We had to cram in some background vocals and percussion in our home studio over lockdown, but it was basically done before. However... we did mix, master, and release it during the pandemic, so that was weird. The whole pandemic really sucked for us - we lost a ton

of tour dates, and a bunch of great venues and other businesses closed. It was a super bummer, and it doesn't seem like we're even close to being out of it, despite what we're not seeing and hearing on TV. I'm seeing tours and shows cancelled almost daily still.

NCV: You'll be playing Happy Dog with Duo Decibel System and Doug McKean. How'd you all meet up? I just did an open mic with Duo Decibel here on Wednesday, and I know Doug from all his local bands. Great guy. Were you familiar with Sean (Happy Dog former owner)?

JEREMY PORTER: I've known Doug for a long time. His Pogues cover band Boys From the County Hell backed up Spider Stacy in the Detroit Area back in the '00s, I think, and we met that night, then Clashback played with them at the Beachland in the big room a couple years later, which was amazing. I loved his band The Bedroom Legends, and his solo stuff is really incredible. I'm a big fan.

Not sure exactly how we ever connected with Duo Decibel System but we have played a bunch of shows with them over the years - great people and a great band! Always love their stuff, love watching them play. Really looking forward to this lineup!

And I'm not sure if I actually know Sean, maybe I do - I'm terrible with that stuff - but Doug's brother used to work at Happy Dog, I think, and we've played there a few times, including one really memorable night with Bill Fox from The Mice. We have some people who've seen us there and still follow us around a bit. It's awesome. And the hot dogs rule, and they have a Paul Westerberg portrait over one of the booths. What's not to love?

NCV: Where are some of your favorite Cleveland haunts?

JEREMY PORTER: Blue Arrow is my favorite record store in the Cleveland area, but there are a handful of great shops there. I always find something great at Blue Arrow - last time it was an original pressing of Gram Parson's *GP* album. They sell our records there too. They're always really nice to us there, which is maybe not as common as you'd think. Really hope we have time to stop in when we're in town!

NCV: Any other cool Cleveland memories?

JEREMY PORTER: Quite a few! Our song "Bottled Regrets" is about a hangover I had in Cleveland after a show at the old Spitfire, which was a grimy punk dive with one of the nastiest bathrooms I've ever seen. I played Peabody's with SlugBug in the '90s and we slept in our van in a parking lot of some office building for a couple hours before driving all night to get to a matinee show in Worcester, Mass that was never actually booked, unbeknownst to us (this was pre-internet). And I remember seeing Bob Mould at Peabody's shortly after he'd left Husker Du, and The Replacements with the Goo Goo Dolls at The

Agora in 1991 on Westerberg's guest list. I've been to Cleveland many times as a musician and a civilian and always love it.

NCV: You play guitars from Reverend Guitars (Billy Corgan, Black Keys, Reeves Gabrels, etc.) here in Ohio, right?

JEREMY PORTER: Yeah, I love my Reverends! They're based out of Sylvania over near Toledo. My main road guitars are the Pete Anderson signature hollow-bodies, the PA1. I bought one on a whim for recording, fell in love with it, bought a second one, and haven't put them down. They're great, and it's a great company, run and staffed by fantastic wonderful people. I can't say enough about them and their products. I also have an early Eastpointe Reverend, and I'm always watching the racks for something special.

NCV: I know I asked you this before, but since it's awesome, can you talk a bit about how the idea for photographing venue restrooms came about? You really can tell a venue by its pissers...the photos celebrate / lambast the glamour / non-glam of tour life.

JEREMY PORTER: Yeah! Well it just started innocently in Detroit one night at the Corktown Tavern. I was just bored waiting for the show to start and the bathroom was so nasty so I took a snapshot and posted it on my socials and it got a great response and kinda just turned into a thing. Now I've got a prototype coffee table book that I sell in our web store and our merch booth at shows, and I'm looking for a publisher so I can get it out there - so if ya' know anyone!

NCV: What else do you do during down time, on the road or back home?

JEREMY PORTER: I love grilling and smoking. We've always got something on the smoker at home - pork shoulders, briskets, baby backs, chicken, Korean short ribs. When the pandemic started we started doing Whiskey Wednesdays at the house where we make a nice meal and have a drink and crank out some vinyl to break up the endless Groundhog Day pandemic thing, and that's still a thing. Other than that, I go to shows, the occasional metal concert, hang out with my wife, lots of band practices...

On the road down time is so precious. We usually just hang at the hotel and watch TV or something, but as we were talking about, we do like record and guitar shopping. And we like to eat well, so we put some effort into that. When we have excessive downtime I try to get some exercise in, and once in a while we might even do something like a distillery tour or hit the horse races or go see the ocean or something.

Jeremy Porter and The Tucos, with Duo Decibel System and Doug McKean. Thursday, October 13, 2022, at Happy Dog (5801 Detroit Avenue in Cleveland). Doors at 8pm, with \$8 cover. Music starts at 9pm.

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