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Jeremy Porter and The Tucos: Motor City Rock & Roll Comes to The Mel

By: Amy Foxworthy (foxy at indyintune dot com)

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The place to be Thursday night is not Downtown, or Broad Ripple or even Fountain Square. It's at the Melody Inn where Detroit (original) Rock n' Roll band Jeremy Porter and the Tucos will be rocking your faces off, performing tracks from their forthcoming 3rd full-length record, "Don't Worry, It's Not Contagious," with support from The Abandoned and Those Dirty Horse.



Performing as a trio since 2010, Jeremy Porter and the Tucos (Jeremy Porter - Guitar, Vocals, Patrick [Patty Two Shoes] O'Harris – Bass, Gabriel Doman – Drums) blur the genre lines with their refreshing blend of indie/punk/alt-country/power pop/straight up American rock & roll sounds. Appropriately stated by the band's bio, "They sound like guitars and whiskey, hooks and heartache, energy and passion. You'll find everything from Cheap Trick to Gram Parsons, Hüsker Dü to Uncle Tupelo, and Merle Haggard to Ted Nugent on their turntables. The racket they make is a little bit of each." Although while listening to their songs, you might hear hints of who their influences may be, at the same time they are undoubtedly original and possess a unique sound different than any other band I've listened to previously.

With 4, 7' singles, 1 live acoustic EP, and now 3 full length releases, Jeremy Porter and the Tucos have no shortage of material out there for you to feast your ears upon. Of note, their brilliantly-named 2015 release, "Above the Sweet Tea Line" is an eclectic masterpiece containing 10 tracks with something for every music lover. It's got twang, it's got a little banjo, it's got dirty guitar riffs, it's got a song about a badass pet cat; it's fun while also substantive with big hooks and nice riffs. A solid album and my first taste of the band, it left me intrigued to see what they would do next. Luckily, I did not have to wait long.

"Don't Worry, It's Not Contagious" will not be released until November 10th, but I was lucky enough to get the opportunity to hear it in advance and can testify wholeheartedly that it is a legitimately pleasing sonic experience. Without spoiling too much before you get to hear it for yourself, it contains 11 diverse tracks full of stylistic guitar solos, groovy rhythms and lyrics you'll wish you'd written. Each track has its own sound, but they also fit together very nicely as one collective piece. After listening to the record 3-4 times, good luck getting the infectious "Worth the Wait" out of your head. If you figure out a way, let me know, as I haven't gotten shit done at work all week as a result of this song playing on repeat in my brain. Also of note, for my punk rockers, check out "Patty's Not Impressed," an anecdotal tribute to the band's bassist. Another favorite is a track called, "Don't Have to Ask Twice," containing my favorite guitar solo on the album, as well as some painfully relatable lyrics.

This album, for lack of better ability to explain, is just..."real." There is nothing forced about it; nothing contrived. When listening to this record you can tell this band is comfortable in their skin and they know exactly who they are and aren't trying to be anything else. It earns a spot in one of my favorite, but hardest to obtain categories: Records you can listen to from start-to-finish without wanting to skip any tracks in between; a rare achievement seldom accomplished.

Jeremy recently (and kindly) made himself available to answer some of my rambling questions about the band's formation, style/influences, upcoming record, pet cats, and the way Indy smells...

Interview

Tell us the tale of the formation of the band in 2010. Were you looking to start a band, was someone trying to get you to join theirs; how did it all fall into place?

Jeremy Porter: Hey Amy! Yeah, I had spent the previous year and a half touring solo in support of my first (and only) solo album "Party of One" at the time. I had been in bands for over 20 years and needed a break, needed to do my own thing on my own terms for a bit. Then after a lot of nights out on the road by myself, I started longing for the camaraderie and collaboration that comes with a band. I was asked to contribute a song to a Christmas comp so I got Gabe on board and Jason from my previous band The OffRamps and we recorded the song and played a show. Here we are 7 years and a few hundred shows later!

What were you doing musically before you formed this band? Solo stuff, playing with other bands? How did you start out in music?

Jeremy Porter: I grew up in a musical house. My parents had a great record collection and my mom played piano and a little guitar. I had a guitar pretty early on but didn't really fully dive in until I was in junior high school. I loved listening to their records – Stones, Beatles, Dylan, Beach Boys. Then I started getting into my own stuff – Cheap Trick, KISS, The Who, before eventually going through a pretty intense metal phase and eventually discovering punk and finally country. My first band was called The Regulars and we were one of the first punk bands in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Since then, making music has been my priority. I moved downstate and played in bands that toured regionally for the next 20 years or so – Chutes & Ladders, SlugBug and The OffRamps mostly.

Who were some of your early musical influences (bands/artists)?

Jeremy Porter: Early on I was way into The Who and some of the better metal bands of the early 80s – Ozzy, Scorpions, and Iron Maiden. When I heard The Clash everything changed. It was suddenly obtainable. I couldn't play like Randy Rhoads, but I could play like Joe Strummer.

I'm a big fan of your guitar style—it is unmistakably rock and roll, but there's also some country-ish, some punk, etc. so eclectic; who are some of your specific-guitar influences? Was there anyone/band that really inspired you or made you first want to learn?

Jeremy Porter: That's really nice – thanks! Early on it was Rick Nielsen, some of the metal guys. A few years later I really got into Bob Stinson from the Replacements. I love how he would play right on the edge of making the whole song fall apart but then come back in and just pull it together. Bob Mould from Husker Du was a big influence. It was kind of like the shredding the metal guys did, but so much more chaotic and less precise. It was beautiful. I'm also into Billy Zoom from X and J Mascis from Dinosaur Jr.

From a writing perspective, Keith Richards and Pete Townshend were huge to me as far as playing under the vocals. The importance of well-placed power chords, riffs, and space. It's one of the hardest, but most important things.

I guess to add to that, was there ever any specific song, band or event that really flipped that switch for you and made you realize that it was definitely music that you wanted to pursue?

Jeremy Porter: Hmm. There were a couple pivotal moments where I remember music really provoking an emotional response that I didn't get anywhere else, but more from a consumer side. The first time I heard I Want You to Want Me was huge. It probably wasn't even called it at the time, but power pop – the intensely catchy melody and hooks against a nicely overdriven guitar and beat really hit a nerve. Hearing The Clash and the Dead Kennedys. I hated punk but I didn't know why, just because I came from a small town and was supposed to. When I got past that hang-up, things really opened up.

Fun, random question that I like to ask just about everyone.... Do you remember the very first album you ever bought with your own money, and also, what was the most recent music purchase you made?

Jeremy Porter: The first record I bought with my own money was KISS Alive! At the Fashion Square Mall in Saginaw, MI. I got a lot of records as gifts – Beach Boys – Endless Summer, Get The Knack, Budokan, Queen's Greatest Hits. My most recent purchase was the Lillie Mae record on Third Man Records. I've been listening to it digitally for a few months but finally got the vinyl at the TMR store in Detroit. The most recent Steve Earle record is fantastic. The Plurals – from Lansing, our label-mates – released a fantastic record called Swish about a month ago that I can't stop listening to. I listen to music constantly and am always buying new records.

Another fun random question: Something people might be surprised to see/might not expect in your music collection?

Jeremy Porter: I have a soft spot for pop and 60s/70s girl bands. I love ABBA. Those songs are fantastic. Pussy Cat from France, the Nippon Girls records from Japan. The last couple years I've been into Leslie Gore. I can get into some yacht rock. 70s AM radio stuff.

Is there a story behind the band name?

Jeremy Porter: When we did that Christmas comp we needed a name. There's nothing harder than naming a band. Our bassist at the time suggested The Mortimers after the Lee Van Cleef character in The Good, The Bad and The Ugly. There was a hardcore band from Poland with that name, so I suggested The Tucos, after the Eli Wallach character in the same movie. It was available. We needed a name. I don't love it, but it was the best we had at the time. It works, but people are surprised when we don't sound like a straight up Americana band.

The band formed in 2010, and then how long was it before you guys were recording and playing live regularly, etc.? If I am not mistaken, you released a live acoustic recording, and then your first full length in 2013 (Partner in Crime)? Is that around the time you started touring more heavily? Do you remember your first ever live show with The Tucos? Where was it and what was it like?

Jeremy Porter: We recorded that Christmas song before we ever played a show, so we had no stage time before that session. Our first show was at an amazingly awesome dive bar in Royal Oak, MI (just outside of Detroit) called Gusoline Alley. It's not a band bar, they're not set up for shows. I think it was a Sunday night, and there was an incredible blizzard that shut down the whole region. It was a blast, but not really a great show. Two weeks later we were playing Chicago, and a week or 2 after that we were opening for Jesse Malin & the Saint Marks Social in Detroit. By June we had a 3 song EP out on vinyl (Night on the Town) and we were making longer runs. The live acoustic EP preceded the first album, Partner in Crime, and by then we were doing 40-50 shows a year around the US and Canada.

You and The Tucos have played with lots of bands in both the U.S. and Canada over the past several years. Is there any particular tour or show that really stands out? Some of the coolest bands you've played with? Any favorite/memorable venues?

Jeremy Porter: One of our favorite tours was a good run out to Colorado and through the Deep South with our brothers from Kentucky, Those Crosstown Rivals. They took us out and we had a blast. We had just brought Patrick on at bass and we're morphing into a new, exciting phase with the band. We played Huntsville, Alabama on that tour and it was one of my favorite shows ever. We had a really memorable show at Mac's in Lansing early on; that one sticks out for some reason.

I love Barfly in Montreal. Blind Bob's in Dayton. The Burl in Lexington. Our home base in Detroit is PJ's Lager House, which is probably my favorite. Of course the Mel (Melody Inn) in Indy is always a blast. They had to carry me out of there last time. Three Kings in Denver is a great room.

My favorite bands to play with are our friends – The Plurals, Bryan Minks, When Particles Collide, Vibrolas, NP Presley, The Mighty Ffud, Two Cow Garage, etc etc etc. But we have been fortunate to play with a bunch of great national acts – Lydia Loveless a couple times, Supersuckers, Beach Slang, American Aquarium, so many more.

Anywhere (geographically or venue) you haven't played yet that you really want to?

Jeremy Porter: We've played almost every state east of the Rockies. Almost. We'd love to get to Europe and also to the West Coast. As for venues, I've been trying to get into the 7th Street Entry in Minneapolis since I was 16. That's bucket list for sure. We've come close but haven't made it in yet.

Worst, funniest or craziest thing that's happened to you while on tour?

Jeremy Porter: Hmm. Some stories are not appropriate! We once drove 9 hours to play Jacksonville FL only to have the local support band bail on the show with 3 hours' notice, leaving us with no bill, no venue, and an empty gas tank. It was a really shitty situation. The promoter got us into a dive bar – probably the nastiest place I've ever played, cockroaches the size of mice running around. We set up and played to 2 drunk pilots from Alberta, Canada, and a few locals and ended up having a decent night, but that was a rough one. We've played at horrible bars in shopping malls, biker rallies, backyard pool parties, and Italian restaurants. We've headlined burlesque shows. We saw a drunk girl fall into a pool of wet paint. So many adventures!

How much touring have you done/how much time out of the year are you playing live shows?

Jeremy Porter: We do about 40-50 shows a year. We play all over the Midwest regularly, mostly Ohio, Kentucky, Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, New York, Illinois and Indiana. We get to Canada about once a year, Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Windsor, and London. We've done longer runs through the deep south a couple times, the northeast a couple times, and out to Colorado and back through the dustbowl. We play Detroit just a couple times a year, every 3 months maybe. And we get around Michigan as much as we can – Lansing, Grand Rapids, and Kalamazoo.

Writing songs: Some people write lyrics, then come up with guitar, etc. Some people write music first and then try to write lyrics to it. Do you have a "system"/"method" to your songwriting? What is your creative process like?

Jeremy Porter: I usually start with a couple cords and a short lyric or phrase and build it from there. It's all just floating around up in the air and I just grab it and assemble it into a song. That's the easy part. The editing is a bit more involved – I'll get a song about 80% of the way there, demo it, and sit on it for a while. Then I decide - which songs are good enough to take to the band? Then the boys get their hands and ears on them and they become a collaboration in that last step, or they get scrapped. Gabriel, our drummer, has a great ear for arrangements and approach that often changes the way a song comes out, and Patrick adds bass lines that, as a trio, have to be more creative than riding the root to the kick. Write 30, show the boys 23-25, demo 20, record 15, and release 12. Something like that.

Your songs, in large part, seem very situational, experience-driven, lyrically speaking. Are your lyrics inspired by actual events/people, or are they fictitious/from your imagination? For instance, "Walk of Shame," from the new album – is that inspired by an actual woman you know? "Don't Worry," "Worth the Wait..." Are those songs about real things from your life? (From "North of the Sweet Tea Line") Did you actually have a cat named Josh? Haha...)

Jeremy Porter: That's a good question. The answer is....sometimes. Sometimes a song is about a very specific person or situation, like Josh, who absolutely was a bad-ass cat we had when I was a kid. He was so good at hunting that my mom put a bell on his collar to give the critters a fighting chance. It didn't work. Other songs might be loosely based on something that happened to me or someone else, or something from a movie or a book or something. As a songwriter you have the luxury of changing the perspective of a song, combining or embellishing stories, whatever – whatever makes the best song. I'm not concerned about historical accuracy in rock and roll lyrics. Don't Worry... and Walk of Shame are really sort of based on people that I'm sure exist, but maybe I don't really know them. But we all know them – the girl who tears a guy's heart out and hangs all over her new boyfriend at the party, or gets crazy on the weekends and doesn't even think twice about the carnage. I can put myself into a hypothetical situation and write it like it happened to me, even if it's all made up.

You have a brand new record coming out called “Don’t Worry It’s Not Contagious.” When does it come out? How long did you spend writing and recording it?

Jeremy Porter: We've been doing a record every two years since we got together. This album was written after our last record "Above the Sweet Tea Line" was released and it was then recorded very quickly. We started in March and finished in June, then mixed through July. We kept it quick and dirty, for better or worse. It's coming out on November 10th!

Is there a label involved or are you doing it yourself?

Jeremy Porter: Yeah! We've joined GTG Records out of Lansing, MI. We've been playing with some of those bands for a couple years, forging friendships, and it was a pretty natural fit. We were looking for something new and they said "hell yeah!" so here we are. We couldn't be happier about it! They're damn good people, they work hard to perpetuate their scene and the label, and they are in great bands.

The track, “Patty’s Not Impressed”—that is about your bassist, correct? Please tell me a little bit more about this song; definitely a favorite.

Jeremy Porter: Yeah, that's about Patty "Two Shoes" O'Harris, our bass player. True story, every word. He's a character and we love him, but he can be a handful too. He comes from a classic rock background, unlike Gabriel and I who come from more of a punk background. He prefers nuggets or strips to chicken on the bone, which I think is just insane. He's a complicated man who knows what he likes and what he doesn't, and he likes to let us know about it. Musically, it's an homage to X I suppose, sort of exposing our occasional rockabilly side.

Do you have a favorite track off of the new album or any particular track that holds special significance to you?

Jeremy Porter: It's still a bit fresh to say. I need some distance before I can look back on it more objectively. I will say that I think Consolation Prize, Worth the Wait and Don't Have to Ask Twice came out a lot better than I was expecting, even if they're not necessarily my favorite songs on the album. I think Huckleberry is a good pop rock song I've tried to write 100 times. Urge to Cry came off pretty good. From a strictly personal view, Torn is a favorite, because it's about a very specific night in a desolate city that captures pretty well how I was feeling at that minute.

What did you do differently/better/worse than with your first record? How was the process different/better this time around? Anything valuable about the process that you learned between then and now?

Jeremy Porter: With each record we've put less and less emphasis on the technical stuff and more and more on feel and groove. We have gotten away from using click tracks. We're leaving in more mistakes. We're spending less time making something perfect and more time making it feel right. I like that first record, it's probably the best produced, but the second record and especially this one feel looser and more like a band playing to me. Somewhere there's a sweet spot. Whether we found it or not isn't for me to decide, but I think there's always plenty of room for improvement.

Do you feel like where you are from/grew up had/has an impact on your sound/style? Do you feel like you'd have written similar songs with a similar sound if you were from Canada or California or New York? I guess, what, if any impact do you feel your Midwest upbringing has had on your songwriting/music?"

Jeremy Porter: I absolutely think your location has an effect on your music. Don't underestimate the impact of geography on a music scene. Detroit is a very blue collar, working, industrial city and those themes have to come out in the music from there. Michigan is an upper-Midwestern state and those things come into play too. At the same time, as a consumer, I listen to music from all over the place and it has to play into it somehow.

I'm proud to be from Michigan, I think it's a great state, and the Midwest in general. I grew up wearing flannel shirts and Chuck Taylors before grunge was a thing, and we liked the Midwest bands that looked and talked like us – The Replacements, Soul Asylum, bands like that. We liked Black Flag too – but California seemed like another world back then. Minneapolis seemed like it was practically Michigan. They looked like they were freezing in their photos, just like we were!

What advice, if any, do you wish was given to you when you first started (or would it have even mattered), and, do you have any advice/suggestions for local bands just starting out today?

Jeremy Porter: I'm not sure it would have mattered. Kids think they know everything, and there's no telling them otherwise, and that's part of growing up. I wish I'd enjoyed the ride a little more. Been a better person sometimes. Wasted less time when I got frustrated with the people who were pissing me off. At the same time, that stuff has led me here, and I'm still at it, but I have that perspective to remind me what not to do again.

My advice to younger bands is to be a good person. Be nice to the people who work at the clubs. Watch the bands you play with, every show, every time. Give touring bands the sweet spot and most or all of the cash when they play your city. OWN your sound. Don't apologize for your art, even when you feel it wasn't your best. Don't sell yourself short, but don't feel entitled to anything. Work your ass off if you care about your art.

We are super excited you're stopping through to play one of my favorite local venues, The Melody Inn, on October 12th. Is this your first time to Indy, or have you played here before?

Jeremy Porter: Oh, we've played The Mel a few times. It's a great rock and roll bar and nasty in all the right ways. Great punk dive and super nice people. The first time I played Indy was around 1994 at a place called the Emerson Theater I think? It was an all ages, Saturday punk show and we were driving into the city and we couldn't believe how horrible it smelled – this nasty sulfurous smell. We soon discovered that the smell wasn't the city at all, but the battery in our van went bad and was bloated and appeared to be about to explode. Half the band went to Kmart to get a new battery and the other half refused to be in the vehicle after it was discovered. Anyhow, that was my first time in Indy. Up and onward!

What can our readers expect from a Jeremy Porter and the Tucos live show?

Jeremy Porter: A high-energy, well-rehearsed set of Detroit Rock and roll. We'll have some fun, a couple drinks, a few laughs. We'll be playing stuff from our new record and the first two as well. We'll be hanging out and watching the other bands (Those Dirty Horse and The Abandoned).

Thanks so much for your time, Jeremy. We are truly looking forward to seeing the show. Everyone be sure to check out Jeremy Porter and the Tucos live at The Melody Inn Thursday October 12th. Show some Hoosier love and hospitality to our brothers from The Motor City. \$5 cash at the door gets you a great night of rock and roll with Jeremy and The Tucos, The Abandoned and Those Dirty Horse. Watch for their forthcoming record, "Don't Worry It's Not Contagious" out November 10th. You can check them out on YouTube, Facebook, etc. here:

Website: <http://www.thetucos.com/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/JeremyPorterMusic/>

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoo_1tQNXjskcwJkONjeeA

Bandcamp: <https://jeremyporter.bandcamp.com/>

ReverbNation: <https://www.reverbNation.com/jeremyportermusic>

NPR Tiny Desk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPzdMJNLBZc>

Jeremy Porter: Cheers! See you at the show.