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How would you classify your music?

We've always struggled to put a label on the bucket we should be tossed in. On one hand, we can rock it up pretty good with some power-pop or even punky stuff. Fast, melodic, lots of hooks. That's the essence of our live show. Then there's other times we get twangy – like some old-school country or some darker alt-country type stuff. So I would classify it as Rock And Roll, but there's elements of country, punk, powerpop and even a little metal, blues or classic rock sometimes.

It's a tough thing to explain, and I think people aren't always sure what to make of us, but I don't think being difficult to classify is a bad thing. It just means there's probably something for everyone in there. Not into this tune? Go take a leak. In 4 minutes you'll hear something different.

Who are some of your top 5 musical influences?

I'd have to say (in no particular order) The Rolling Stones, Cheap Trick, Gram Parsons, Husker Du/Bob Mould and X. Ask me tomorrow and you'll get a different answer.

What do you want fans to take from your music?

I'm a big proponent of listener interpretation, so I don't really care what they take from it as long as it's positive. One person might really like the guitar work. Someone else might just really like the fact that we are having a blast up there and the whole party aspect of it. Some people seem to really connect with Gabe and Patty's performance. When someone tells me a certain song resonated with them lyrically, that's pretty special too. I'm ecstatic with any or all of that.

Personally, for me, music is all about hooks, melodies and energy. If it makes you move and you can't get it out of your head a couple hours later, that's great. That's how I felt when I first heard I Want You To Want Me in 1979, and I've been trying to create that effect in my own way ever since.

Can you tell us a bit about your latest album? When will it be released and how does it differ from your previous work?

Yeah! Our new record is called Above The Sweet Tea Line. It came out on New Fortune Records (Detroit) on CD/Digital in May and on Vinyl a couple weeks ago. We recorded and mixed it inside of 4 months last winter with the Patalan brothers in Saline, Michigan, the same team we had for our last record Partner In Crime. Those guys are the greatest and push us hard to be our best. With this record we made a concerted effort to record faster and looser, going for more of a live feel. It's also the first record with Patrick O'Harris on bass, and he brings a whole new side of musicianship to the band that just makes this record that much better. His playing and harmonies really took the songs to a new level and forced Gabe and I to up our game.

What happened to your previous bass player? Jason was his name?

Yeah, Jason Bowes. I'd been playing with him for about a decade and we'd seen an awful lot together. He has a son who's growing up quickly and he wants to be there for that, not playing to 4 people in a metal bar in Fort Wayne, Indiana on a Thursday night. It went down really smoothly and we're still great friends. He's playing with some pals of ours – The 44 Territories – from time to time, so he's keeping his chops up while not missing out on those important moments at home. He's a great guy and a great friend and we still run into each other around town.

What do you love and hate about the Music Business?

My favorite thing is the relationships and friendships with the bands and people we've met in our travels. We've made so many friends and it just warms my heart to pull up to a venue and know my pals – who I haven't seen in 6 or 12 months – are in there setting up their gear, ordering beers and ready to get down. Or that bartender or club owner who always wears our shirt and buys our records. Or those pals who always come out in that city. We have shared experiences and adventures that are perpetuating still, and those relationships are really important to me.

There's plenty to hate in the business too. It's brutally hard work, exhausting, often thankless and incredibly frustrating at times. There are times you wanna quit, or kill someone, or cry, or whatever, but thankfully the good times outweigh all that and you learn to get through that crap.

Who are some of the bands and people you've met that have had that impact on you?

Bryan and Those Crosstown Rivals from Lexington are at the top of the list. They've given us some of our best audiences, taken us on tour, seen us at our best and worst, on stage and off. Love those guys. Kevin from New Fortune Records has been great to us since we met him very early in our existence. There's a guy – Kevin – who just loves music and loves Detroit and does right by both. There's plenty more. This last year we've played a few shows with When Particles Collide from Bangor, Maine. Great people, great band. The Vibrolas from KY, on and on. Everyone from Columbus, OH has been really good to us – the Two Cow Garage guys, Jeff German, Todd May, Kyle Sowash, Colin and Joe from Watershed. That's a great scene down there, and we don't always do great there, but they welcome us like family and it's always a great stop. We probably should be from there.

What is the best concert you have been to?

The best concert I've been to? Hmm... Probably The Ramones at Harpo's in Detroit in December of 1988. Or The Replacements in Ann Arbor in April of 1986. Those 2 really had an effect on me. There's been loads of shows really, but I always go back to those 2.

What do you like most about playing live?

Playing live can be a really cathartic experience. When the band is clicking and there's a good room watching, and the sound is good, you sometimes just go into this sort of robotic auto-pilot and it's really an incredible experience. It's a complete connection with your bandmates and the songs and the audience and it's really the culmination of everything we work for. Probably sounds cliché, but it's not an easy place to get to, so when you do, you know there's many hours and a good amount of hard work behind it, so it's very rewarding.

Is there a song on this latest CD that stands out as your personal favorite, and why?

I really like the way Hey Kentucky turned out, and it's about our pals from Lexington, and Bryan sang on it, so that's special. Don't Call Me Darlin' is pretty close to me too, and having Jillian Rae sing on that was a real treat. Most people like Bottled Regrets and Elimination Round best, and I'm ok with those too.

How have you evolved as an artist over the last few years?

I guess I've learned to embrace the things that are important to me and let go of the things that aren't. Living in the moment, having happy bandmates, writing and recording the best songs we can, playing good shows, and being a good person to the people we meet are all really important. Making lots of money, being a big part of the Detroit scene, these things would be nice, but I don't consider them priorities or something to dwell on. Letting go of the things you can't control and just working as hard as you can on the things you can is incredibly liberating and rewarding, but it's a learned skill.

What made you decide to come back into the music business?

Well, I never really left – I've pretty much been at this in some form or another since I was 16 years old. I've been in ruts from time to time, been in bands that weren't going anywhere, resulting in some awkward times that took a while to recover from, but I've learned when to move on and get busy doing something new. I don't really feel like I've got any time to waste, so I just keep working as hard as I can to continue moving forward. When it gets stagnant I make a change.

If you could meet, play a gig, co-write a song, have dinner, get drunk with any band or artist (dead or alive) who would it be?

Probably to hang out and strum guitars with Keith Richards. The dude is just so happy and full of knowledge. It's probably a generic answer, but damn, that would be fun. I'd love to have a couple drinks with Shane Macgowan, preferably in about 1986 as his most creative. What an amazing talent.

What's going on in Detroit these days?

This is a tough town. We don't really have a strong foothold in the scene here and we usually do a lot better on the road. We can put together a good show, but we don't play in town that often. It's very clique-y here, and with our travel schedule we don't get to play the social game as much as we probably should to get in with some of the bigger local bands. Still, a couple of them have been great to us. We're lucky to be in good with a few people who bring in some great touring bands and run a couple of the better local clubs, so we get some great opening slots and there really is some great talent in this town, and some genuinely good people, and we're proud to be from here. We love Detroit and Michigan and say it proudly wherever we go.

We're going to wrap up this year with a tour of the Southeastern USA in support of Above The Sweet Tea Line, then we'll do a big record release show in Detroit in November then probably take it easy for the last few weeks of the year. The next record is mostly written, about 1/3 learned, and we need to start demoing those tunes. Next year we'll play a ton of shows and start the next record. Can't wait!