

Jeremy Porter & The Tucos set to impress

Armed with new album, Detroit-based band plays The Livery on Friday

- By JEREMY D. BONFIGLIO - Sight & Sound Editor



Detroit-based band Jeremy Porter & The Tucos featuring, from left, Gabriel Doman, Porter and Patrick O'Harris, performs Friday at The Livery in Benton Harbor.

BENTON HARBOR — There's a song on Jeremy Porter & The Tucos' new album, "Don't Worry, It's Not Contagious," called "Patty's Not Impressed," which is written about the trio's opinionated bass player Patrick O'Harris.

"Patty is a bit of a character," Porter says by phone from his home near Detroit. "He's one who is not slow to voice his opinion on something, and we spend a lot of time together driving around the country in a van, so we get to hear all of the things Patty doesn't like, and eventually it worked its way into a two-and-a-half-minute song. What's funny is that some of these are really unconventional things. Like, Patty doesn't like the Ramones. Who doesn't like the Ramones? There's like eight people who love music who don't like the Ramones, and Patty is one of them."

Of course, the song title itself begs the obvious question.

"Was Patty impressed with the song?" Porter says, laughing. "It's funny. Sometimes he is quick to judge, and other times he really, really takes his time to think about something. This was one of those moments. Then we were in the van one day and all he said was, 'You know, half of that isn't even true.'"

That still hasn't kept the song out of the set list, which includes Friday's show at The Livery.

The band, which features, Porter on guitars, vocals, organ, piano and harmonica, O'Harris on bass and Gabriel Doman on percussion, formed in 2010, in Plymouth, Mich., taking the name from the character Tuco Ramirez, played by actor Eli

Wallach, in “The Good, The Bad & The Ugly.” The name was an alternative to a suggestion by original bassist Jason Bowes, who proposed The Mortimers – after the Lee Van Cleef character in the same film – when they discovered a punk band from Poland had already claimed it.

It’s fitting since there’s a bit of punk swagger behind Porter & The Tucos as well. While the bio on the band’s website may compare their sound to that of “whiskey, hooks and heartache,” influences range from Cheap Trick to The Replacements to Johnny Cash to Social Distortion.



Detroit-based band Jeremy Porter & The Tucos featuring, from left, Patrick O’Harris, Gabriel Doman and Porter, performs Friday at The Livery in Benton Harbor.

“Huckleberry,” the first single off “Don’t Worry, It’s Not Contagious,” Porter says, almost feels like a discarded track from a 1980s Soul Asylum record.

“It’s really a power-pop rock song,” he says. “It’s a little bit uptempo and visits some familiar themes. It’s about the guy who can never quite seem to get the girl, and there’s a little bit of a darker, obsessive side in there for sure. We do this sort of power-pop, metal, punk, alt-country thing, which is why we are often accused of having an identity crisis, because one song sounds like Soul Asylum would have done in 1984 and the next song sounds like The Flying Burrito Brothers or something. That’s part of the dynamic of the band to keep that diversity between alt-country and power-pop.”

Many of the band’s disparate sounds can be traced to Porter’s own musical upbringing in the Upper Peninsula city of Marquette.

“When I was a kid, my parents had a great record collection,” he says. “They had all of the (Bob) Dylan stuff, all of The Beatles, all of the (Rolling) Stones stuff and Beach Boys. I mean, I was listening to that when I was like 5 and 6 years old. Toward the end of the ’70s, I was getting into Fleetwood Mac and stuff like that, then I heard Cheap Trick, and everything just changed. I’ll never forget hearing ‘I Want You To Want Me.’ The hook of that song was just crazy.”

By the early ’80s, Porter took a deep dive into bands such as Def Leppard and Mötley Crüe before being introduced to punk by John Burke, best known as the drummer of the Ann Arbor-based alternative rock band Wig.

“He turned me onto The Clash and Dead Kennedys and ultimately The Replacements, Hüsker Dü, Minutemen,” Porter says. “There was such a lack of pretentiousness to it, so it was life changing.”

Porter and Burke formed The Regulars, one of the UP’s first punk bands, while he was still in high school. After moving to Detroit, “to play rock and roll under the guise of going to college,” Porter says, he spent the next two decades fronting bands like SlugBug, The OffRamps and Fidrych as well as a solo stint. After doing a solo tour for the album “Party of One,” Porter got the urge to form a new band.

“I toured that album about a year-and-a-half, and most of the time it was just me,” he says. “I really started missing the camaraderie that comes with playing with other dudes and that whole gang mentality. I was asked to contribute a song to this Christmas compilation by Suburban Sprawl out of Ann Arbor. I had been talking to Gabriel, our drummer, and I grabbed the bass player from The OffRamps, Jason Bowes, and we basically got together in the basement and hashed that song out in three weeks. We weren’t planning on doing anything, but when the song came out, we were asked to do a show, and then we got a couple really good shows, and things turned quickly to where it was a real band.”

Jeremy Porter & The Tucos released their debut album, “Partner In Crime” in 2013. O’Harris replaced Bowes a year later and the trio released “Above The Sweet Tea Line” in 2015, and “Don’t Worry, It’s Not Contagious” in November on GTG Records, a Lansing-based label. In addition to CD and digital download, the album was released on vinyl, pressed at the new Third Man Pressing plant, the manufacturing branch of Detroit native Jack White’s Third Man Records.

Which, of course, is impressive, even for Patty. As for everything else, well ...

“I think we’re working our way into a ‘Patty’s Not Impressed’ concept album,” Porter says, laughing. “If we added in everything Patty didn’t like, we’d be up to about two-and-a-half hours now.”

If You Go

Who: Jeremy Porter & The Tucos

When: 9 p.m. Friday

Where: The Livery, 190 Fifth St., Benton Harbor

How much: Free

Contact: 925-8760 or www.liverybrew.com

Artist info: www.thetucos.com