



# THE XPERIENCE MONTHLY

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July 2026 || Vol. 8, Issue 7

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## The Dirt Band Shine at the Egg; Impressive Opener Meels Chats with RRX

An Interview by OP Callaghan

I was fortunate enough to catch The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band at The Egg in Albany. For those who don't know, TNGDB, also known as The Dirt Band, hail from Long Beach, California. Founded in 1966, the band originally included solo artist Jackson Browne. They have won three Grammy Awards and have recorded over 25 albums. Their show at The Egg included covers from Bob Dylan, Rodney Crowell, Bruce Springsteen, and The Band. Their concert spanned a six-decade career, showcasing the band's ability to blend original fan favorites and covers, with a balance of country, bluegrass, folk, and rock. The band's sharp performance perfectly illustrated what nearly 60 years of experience means. I was not terribly familiar with the band prior to this show, but a crash course listening to some of their more popular albums, such as 1972's "Will The Circle Be Unbroken" and pop hits such as "Mr Bojangles," jarred my memory into the realization that I had heard more of them than I had thought. Fronted by singer/guitarist Jeff Hanna and drummer/vocalist Jimmie Fadden, and featuring Hanna's son Jaime on guitar, Bob Carpenter on keys/vocals, Ross Holmes on fiddle/mandolin, and Jim Photoglo on bass, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band did not disappoint. From the opener, "You Ain't Goin' Nowhere,"

to the closer, "Will The Circle Be Unbroken," the stellar musicianship and performance kept the packed theater rocking to these true pioneers of American roots music. It was a great show by a great band.

Opening up the show was Mill Valley, California's own Meels, a remarkably talented young lady, whose devotion and commitment to early country music is worn proudly on the sleeve of her vintage dress. My daughter and I spent several days listening to Meels' two full-length releases: "Tales from a Bird's Bedroom" and "Across the Raccoon Strait." Her songs and lyrics are catchy, whimsical, and at times dark, suggesting a deep life experience beyond her years. Songs like "The Falcon and the Loon," "The Wizard," and "Out West" show a devotion to the genre, as well as a deep, passionate talent that is both endearing and beautiful. Her performance at The Egg with guitar and vocal accompaniment from Jackson Craig included her originals as well as some wonderful cover choices from the Beatles, Neil Young, Dolly Parton, and John Prine. Her version of "Angel From Montgomery" is one of the finest performances that I have seen. Meels is the real deal; both talented and confident in her work, without

t arrogance or desperation. So, I was thrilled to not only see her performance but to get a few minutes to chat with this exceptionally gifted young lady.

**RRX:** Wow! That was really great. Tell me how you got started in your musical career.

**Meels:** My parents put me in piano lessons from the early age of 5. I was the only one out of my sisters who stuck with it !!

**RRX:** I'm glad that you did! Do you come from a musical family?

**Meels:** My grandmother grew up as a concert pianist, and my uncle is a bluegrass musician.

**RRX:** Who were some of your musical influences when you were younger?

**Meels:** Lady Gaga was huge for me; Peter Paul and Mary, John Denver, and the Beatles !!

**RRX:** Who inspires you now?

**Meels:** I am still incredibly inspired by John Denver and early '70s folk like Peter, Paul and Mary. But now, Paul McCartney specifically is a huge influence for me. Loretta Lynn, Marty Robbins, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Willie Nelson ... I could go on !!

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## THIS MONTH'S FEATURES

### Meels



### Jeff Keith



### Jeff Manion



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**RRX:** Your writing and performance style is so reminiscent of traditional country music, with all of the heart and soul of someone much older than you. How do you explain that?

**Meels:** My whole life, I have been told I have an old soul. I think I just resonate with old things, like vintage clothing, old music, and history. A psychic once told me that I have lived over 30 past lives.

**RRX:** You've been on tour with The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, which traditionally draws an older audience. How was that experience?

**Meels:** I think that because I make music that has a more vintage feel, it really resonates with Nitty Gritty's audience!! I personally loved playing shows for their audience and had a lot of great interactions with them at the merch table.

**RRX:** Clearly, you were more than accepted! What's something that you're passionate about outside of music?

**Meels:** Vintage clothing, crocheting, and my dachshund. I am a grandma at heart.

**RRX:** What are your future plans? Are you touring this summer?

**Meels:** I will be hitting a few festivals and one off shows this summer, including but not limited to, Jackelope Jamboree and Bourbon & Beyond.

**RRX:** What is one of your songs that you are especially proud of, or most pleased with the performance of?

**Meels:** I am especially pleased with "The Wizard."

**RRX:** It's truly a great song. I really like the choice of cover tunes that you played in your set. Before you played it, you called Neil Young's "Harvest Moon" the "greatest love song ever written". I love that insight. Besides Neil, who are some other artists that inspire you outside of country music?

**Meels:** Paul McCartney, Paul Simon, JJ Cale, Jim Croce, Joan Baez, Janis Joplin, Billy Joel, and the Carpenters, to name a few!

**RRX:** That's quite a palate! Thanks for what you do, Meels. I'm looking forward to seeing you again!



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An Interview

# Jim Kaufman, new owner of Last Vestige Record Shop

by Chad Koenig

On June 1, people throughout the region collectively gasped as they scrolled through social media posts regarding Albany's treasured Last Vestige record store. Whether you were reading from the official page of the store, or through those who shared it, those first words posted of: "WELL ... 13,353 days ago, I opened LAST VESTIGE," automatically gave you a lump in your throat.

In the world we live in, we fear the worst while reading the first words of headlines, because, most of the time, it IS for the worst. But as you read on, you saw that the store did not close, but that Jim Furlong, who has owned this mecca of vinyl treasure, was retiring after a storied career, which, earlier in 2026, saw him go into the prestigious Eddie Awards Hall of Fame.

The announcement was made that Mr. Furlong sold the company to his beloved employee Jim Kaufman, who has worked on and off since Memorial Day of 1999.

**RRX:** Congratulations on the acquisition of Last Vestige. You have inherited a local institution. When you started working here, did you ever think that someday this would be all yours?

**JK:** I wished it. I know it sounds cheesy, but the first time I walked in here, I felt it. I was so into owning music at that point, and the prices were great for a 14-year-old with no money. The more I came in here, the more I thought "this is what I want to do." I got hired on Memorial Day of 1999 and said, "Let's see how this goes!"

**RRX:** You stated in your Facebook post when you announced the purchase that you first bought a KISS record here in 1994. What are your favorite bands or styles to collect?

**JK:** My favorite bands were Black Sabbath and Pink Floyd, and if I saw something I didn't have, I grabbed it. I went through a huge KISS phase, but those guys are just too hard to collect with all of their merch.

I like a lot of hard rock and heavy metal, especially classic metal from the late '70s and '80s. But for the past 10 years or so, I've really done a 180 and started collecting jazz.

**RRX:** What is your holy grail vinyl in your collection?

**JK:** I've got a first pressing mono Velvet Underground album with the banana cover, but without the banana, unfortunately. But it's in pretty decent shape. I've got some metal albums and jazz albums as well that have some value.

**RRX:** Speaking of the price point, is there a record that has eluded you that you're hoping to find someday, or maybe come through these doors?

**JK:** The Beatles' "Yesterday and Today" with the infamous "butcher cover." Both of my employees have one. I mean, I can just go online and buy one, but I want to get it here. They average about \$500.

**RRX:** Obviously, Jim Furlong had faith in you to pass the torch to you. Do you remember the moment when he knew you'd be the best person to take over?

**JK:** Yeah, actually, literally standing right here in the middle of the store while I was filing stuff away. He just walked up to me. He said, "Hey, listen, do you have X amount of money?" And I'm like, "Nope, but I can get it!" But we actually talked about it with ALL of the employees about three years ago. He said that his wife was going to retire soon and wanted to spend time with her. He asked, "Would you guys want to carry on? Because I don't want to let it go. This is my baby." I was like, hell yeah, I'll do it. And everyone else was on board, too. Then we didn't really talk about it again until recently when he said, "I think I'm done - do you want to do it?" I'm like, "Yeah, hell yeah, I want to do it!"

**RRX:** Will you be adding more of an online presence, maybe host podcasts, etc.?

**JK:** Yes, 100%. My relaxation routine is sitting on YouTube and TikTok, and watching people go through the records. I mean, it's as nerdy as you can get.

There are a lot of really good YouTube channels out there of people who own shops, people who review records. They just grab a stack of vinyl and start going through it. And a thousand people are watching them do it. I'm one of them. I definitely want to do that. I'd love to get a podcast going. We have somebody that I know who might be lending a hand when it comes to that. She's tuned in to the younger generation, so I'll be talking to her about that soon.

**RRX:** When buying used products, what are you going to be looking for? What are you pushing to acquire, and is there stuff you aren't interested in buying?

**JK:** Classical used to be a big one. But it hasn't been selling. I keep some around, but generally we don't pay for it because it's so abundant and doesn't really sell. Anything pre-1950 doesn't really sell.

We have music from all around the world. I'm interested in everything if I can sell it, but it has to be in very good shape to buy it. Especially for CDs. People think CDs are indestructible, but I've seen CDs come in and say, "What did you do to this thing?" I mean, they had to go out of their way to do this!

**RRX:** The Last Vestige eBay store has successfully sold over 40,000 items in its years of operation. Will you maintain the same way, or do you plan on making any changes to that or selling additional merchandise?

**JK:** eBay's a little tough. Discogs is more up our alley. It's more geared towards music lovers. You can find just about anything on Discogs. eBay's good for the rare items. I'm going to keep eBay up, but I'm going to be a little bit more selective on what goes up there. Kim meticulously runs our



mail order and Discogs page. No scratch gets past her. She's why our ratings are through the roof.

**RRX:** The vinyl boom is back in a big way, with colored vinyl and all that cool stuff. Many of them carry a heftier price tag. What will influence you on what new product you decide to bring into the store?

**JK:** We want to bring in popular titles that we can't keep on the shelves. For example, "Back in Black" by AC/DC. I would definitely buy more new copies of heavy metal records because we can't keep that in stock. When we advertise metal records coming in, they sell immediately. Another one is "Pet Sounds" by the Beach Boys. As for the specialized editions and colored vinyl, it depends on what we can get it for. Everything, though, depends on how we can compete with online retailers.

**RRX:** Every April, Record Store Day is celebrated. Do you plan on participating in them going forward and selling their exclusive items?

**JK:** It's difficult for us to do those exclusives, again, because of the markup and space. And a lot of the time, people will buy the items just to sell them on eBay, and that's not what we want to represent.

Continued on Page 24...

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An Interview:

# Crystal Dea Moore & Jeff Moore

## Peak Music & Dance

**RRX:** Alright, Crystal and Jeff. Or is it Jeff and Crystal? I don't know. Crystal and Jeff kind of rolls better.

(All Laugh)

**CM:** Whatever works.

**RRX:** Well, anyway, you guys got a lot going on.

**CM:** We do, that's for sure.

**RRX:** I know some of it, but I don't know it like you do. So why don't you just dive into it and tell us all the exciting news?

**JM:** Okay, well ... at Peak Music, we wanted to have a place where you could learn the things that I always wanted to learn, and the way that we had learned them over the years, with voice, guitar, and songwriting, which we had to travel all over the country to get training on. We wanted it here, so we moved to Cohoes, and we had a storefront there for a number of years. And then COVID hit. So we reconfigured (in our basement) a boutique place because we had no idea how long we would be isolated. And then a short story after that, we were working on our musical project Dark Ballet, and we coordinated with a fabulously talented choreographer and dancer, Jillian Ruddy. We put a show on with her, and I was just so impressed by her desire and drive for excellence and artistic creativity. Crystal and I sat down and said, "We need to be in business with her," so we made our business model work, and Crystal was able to coordinate all of the business threads of that. I would have been living in the gutter if I were in charge of the business pieces of it. Now we're in a new place. So that's the encapsulation.

**CM:** The vision as we went with Jillian, I mean ... I think Peak Music Studios has

always had the vision of wanting to be a place where you can express your creative self and be excellent at what you do. Be pushed, yet supported. Basically ... we outgrew our space. We needed to find something that would accommodate the people that wanna be part of our community. We started working with Jillian, and it became clear that we really wanted to have a place where artistic excellence is supported, and people feel a sense of belonging and community. Artistic excellence means, however you define it in terms of your ability to be the most excellent musician or dancer that you can be, as well as having a place where people have a sense of belonging and can cross boundaries in terms of culture and background; come together and make music and dance together.

**RRX:** You're basically the one-stop shop right now.

**CM:** Yeah, multidisciplinary arts center.

**JM:** Crystal touched on something, and I wanna just define that a little further. She talked about artistic excellence. Our dream is that we have students who would otherwise not be able to be in an environment where they can get a Berklee-level education in music or a New York City-level ballet education in the same building. They have the opportunity to go as far as they want, or if they're just interested in doing it as a hobby, it doesn't mean that they can't have a high level of instructor capability. We want to balance those pieces, and I'm just very happy to be involved with two such talented people for Peak Music and Dance (or PMAD if you want to contract it).

**RRX:** It's got a ring to it.

**CM:** Yeah, we want people to understand, too, that there is a place for

everyone as long as you are willing to and have a desire to be a part of an artistic community and to give the best that you possibly have, whatever that level might be. We have classes for kids, adults, and people with special needs, so it really crosses the spectrum of folks out there.

**JM:** We have a class, "Sing and Dance Like a Broadway Star." I was thinking you might be interested, Rob.

**RRX:** I'm interested in a lot of this. I even look at, like, the guitar instruction options because I've been stuck in the same spot since I was a kid, and I just can't get out of it.

**CM:** Well, you know where to come.

**JM:** Yeah, we do hear a lot of that. People may have a high level of technical skill, and they may really lack the theory to understand what they're doing with voice or guitar. We like to see smiles on people when we fill in the blanks.

**RRX:** That's exactly it. There are blanks. Everyone's got them, and they need to be filled in. Like for me, for example, I feel like I have all the music inside me, but my hands aren't doing it. You know?

**CM:** We hear that a lot. Absolutely. Jeff and Jillian will be teaching "Sing and Dance Like a Broadway Star." We're also gonna have a class called "Keyboards for Vocalists." We're also gonna do "Sing and Dance Like A Pop Star." Then we're gonna have creative movement classes for kids that combine music and movement. As well as, we do have a competition dance team, so we've got that going on ...

**JM:** Fully formed and successful.

**CM:** Yeah, we're walking in the doors of



920 Albany Shaker with over 100 students.

**RRX:** Wow. That's the way to start, holy moly!

**CM:** Exactly, but it's not a new business per se, right? It's just the next evolution. This is eight years of blood, sweat, and tears just to get to the place where we could make this next leap. On Saturday, August 22nd, from 2 to 4 p.m., we're having a community open house; that's our grand opening community open house.

**RRX:** And if people are interested and they are unable to make the open house, what's the best way to reach out to you?

**CM:** It's PeakMusicandDance.com, and there's a form on the website for consultations. Come in if you're a musician or a dancer, we can answer your questions, take a look at the space, and see what we can offer you. So that's the best way to reach us. We're also on all social media, too.

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THE DANDY WARHOLS 2006 PHOTO CREDIT: NICOLE NOLAND

# THE RECORD FILE

By Tony Mastrianni

## NEIL YOUNG & The Chrome Hearts captured live on new double LP

In the long life of rock music, Neil Young has been able to explore different styles in his own vision. During his early musical start in Canada as a teenager, through a move to California in the mid-'60s, to today, six solid decades later, there has been an unending drive to write songs that are directly from the soul and performed with pure passion. He is someone who looks within and reflects all he sees and feels. With his band, the Chrome Hearts, he continues this expressive excursion. Recorded in Europe, the U.K., the U.S., and Canada during The Love Earth Tour 2025, "As Time Explodes" is a recently released live double album, one that captures all of the abilities they've found playing together. Exploring the vast history of Young's songs from his entire catalog. It's a journey through time. By freeing themselves from the past, they can perform some of the most exciting songs of a storied history, always showing how the present sounds, redefining the past, and presenting it in the here and now.

Neil Young and the Chrome Hearts have an inspiring artifact here! The Chrome Hearts are Spooner Oldham (keyboards), Micah Nelson (guitar, String man & vocals), Corey McCormick (bass and vocals), Anthony LoGerfo (drums & vocals), and Neil (amp, guitar, pump organ, piano and vocals). This band goes into that sublime space shared with each of Young's groups that have become part of the evolution of rock and roll. Highlights are "Ohio," "Harvest Moon," "After the Goldrush," and an all-out incredible live take of "Like a Hurricane." Neil Young and the Chrome Hearts have recaptured the vibe Neil had going many years ago with his band, Crazy Horse, in a live concert setting. Keep on rockin', Neil!

In celebration of the 33rd anniversary of their groundbreaking and chart-topping debut album "Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We?," THE CRANBERRIES have released the 33rd Anniversary Deluxe Edition on Island Records. The premier album is presented in seven different configurations with

assorted extra content, including completely new 2026 stereo mixes by the albums original producer Stephen Street, track-by-track notes from the band, art notes from original designer Cally Callomon, and photographer Andy Earl, and assorted remixes including the dreamy remix of "Linger" by CHVRCHES.' Bonus Content Includes Spanish Versions of Singles "Linger" and "Dreams" featuring BRATTY and ANASOF.

Originally released in 1993, "Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We?" hit the No. 1 spot in both the UK and Ireland and has sold more than six million copies across the globe. They broke out with two Top Ten singles – the debut lead single "Dreams" and its mainstream breakthrough follow-up, "Linger," which cemented the band's position within the rock world; the album highlighted the unique vocal stylings of Dolores O'Riordan (whose untimely passing in 2018 rocked the music industry). Combining Gaelic, Catholic, and indie vocal influences,

O'Riordan coupled her relatable lyrics that captured the frustrations of late adolescence, giving these songs universal appeal. All these years since its release, this carefully crafted debut has stood the test of time as a landmark album.

**DEE SNIDER AND TRACII GUNS JOIN CARMINE APPICE AND CACTUS FOR "THE LITTLE RED ROOSTER" from CLEOPATRA RECORDS**

- "The Little Red Rooster" is one of the all-time consummate Chicago blues numbers. Written by the great Willie Dixon in 1961, it was first recorded by Howlin' Wolf that same year, before becoming a major US hit for Sam Cooke in 1963. The following year, it became a worldwide mega-smash by the Rolling Stones. In fact, "Little Red Rooster" remains the only true blues number ever to top the UK charts. Now, the Rooster is back again in the capable hands of drum legend Carmine Appice and his rejuvenated band, Cactus's new album,

although it was not made by Cactus alone. Hot on the news of his retirement from live work, Dee Snider (Twisted Sister) turns in a characteristically charismatic lead vocal; Tracii Guns (LA Guns) lays down his most blues-wailing guitar work.

Also, just out is a DEAD BOYS Two-For-One LP. It is part of the label's very sought-after Live Bootleg Series, titled "Down on the Bowery/From the Sleaziest Catacombs"; you get two no-holds-barred live sets as recorded at CBGB's in NYC in 1977 and 1978, respectively. Each set is wild and lascivious, with Stiv Bators on vocals. His style sounds like his idol, Jim Morrison, in the punk groove. Ironically, both Stiv and Jim died many years apart, each while visiting France. This 2-for-1 CD addition is full of great guitar riffs and brazen vocals tied to a tight rhythm section.

**To celebrate reaching its 50th Anniversary, electro pioneers Kraftwerk have recently released three new editions of their 1975 album "Radio-Activity" on Parlophone Records.** Using the original 16-track master tapes, Kraftwerk founder Ralf Hütter, with engineer Fritz Hilpert, has created a brand-new Dolby Atmos stereo mix which takes Kraftwerk's first all-electronic album and brings vivid new ear candy with immersive and richly layered depth. It is perhaps the most experimental album in the Kraftwerk catalog.

There are three formats of "Radio-Activity" available now as follows (1) A Blu-ray audio disc featuring Dolby Atmos mix plus an inner booklet housed in 50th Anniversary artwork containing stunning audio content; (2) A spectacular 12" vinyl picture disc (2009 stereo remaster); and (3) A full digital release.

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# 2.. 3.. 4.. - Apple Pies & Sweaty Guys

By Chris Busone

This month, we will commemorate 250 years of an idea; a dream of a nation of freedom, liberty, and inclusion for all those yearning to be free. Yes, on the 4th we will celebrate in grand style, complete with hot dogs, apple pie, and if we're lucky, maybe even some sweaty guys in various stages of undress duking it out on the White House lawn. BOO-YA ... that's how we do it, people.

And we'll celebrate these lofty ideals, even though that's not really who we are at this moment in our history ... the liberty, freedom, and inclusion part, I mean. The sweaty guys rolling around on the lawn part; we're definitely that right now. All day long. 100%.

A true American and patriot once said, "A man may die, nations may rise and fall. But an idea lives on." That man was John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the 35th President of these United States. And while he was certainly an imperfect man and by all accounts no slave to fidelity, he loved this country and all its people. And in the short time he was its leader, he did it proud and did all he could to live up to that idea of freedom, liberty, and inclusion. He literally gave his life for this country and that idea.

Some will argue that it is one's imperfections, as much as their strengths, that make them a great leader. But the current state of our national affairs makes it more than self-evident that being a serial philanderer alone does not a great president make. No, you also need character, compassion, intellect, and an unyielding desire to serve the people. All of the people. All of the time. Kennedy, for his part, had that.

The fact is, it is our intentions, our actions, our deeds by which we are measured and what unites us. And folks, we are anything but a group of united states right now.

Red states hate those commie liberal blue states, and blue states think red states are simple-minded jerkweeds who are nostalgic for a world that never existed.

I mean, when the hell was America so great that you want to make it that again ... again? What time in our history was that?

I'm pretty sure the original occupants don't long for the days when Custer and his henchmen bugle-charged them off their land and out of their homes with a "move or die" pick-em situation. "No worries, folks, it's all good. A hundred years from now, we're gonna hook you up with a bangin' casino." How about those kooky, fun-filled days up until late 1920, when women couldn't even vote? That was pretty great, right? Or the '50s and '60s, when Black Americans had fire hoses turned on them for wanting to have a sandwich at a lunch counter or were spat on for trying to go to school? Who thinks that was great? Show of hands ... anyone? Oh, and how great were those glorious '80s when "stop and frisk" and the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 led to a disproportionate number of Americans of color being arrested for infinitesimal amounts of weed or blow and being sentenced to decades behind bars. It all sounds really, really great again ... again.

Look, I'll be the first to admit I'm just a guitar player, but even I know this is f\*\*\*ed up.

Here's a taste of how un-united we are right now: Arkansas and Utah refused to celebrate Pride Month in June this year. They instead named it "Fidelity Month." Not to be outdone (or out-moron-ed as the case may be), Tennessee, Alabama, and Indiana declared June "Nuclear Family Month". Huh? That's how we make America great again ... again? By discounting a

significant segment of its population and refusing to recognize them, simply because who they lay next to in bed makes you feel icky? Like it's any of your goddamn business to begin with.

Well, it's history lesson time, my hillbilly scholars. In 1999, the month of June was declared by then-President Bill Clinton as National Gay & Lesbian Pride Month. A presidential declaration, nationally recognized every year since. So all you numbnuts in Arkansas, Alabama, and the like, who love to wave around the Constitution with one hand to protect your 2nd Amendment rights, while waving your Confederate flags with the other, need to open your eyes and smarten the hell up. I mean, get in the boat and row, Homer, because a nation divided could very well fall, and you're too stupid to live anywhere else. No one else will take you.

But back to this idea that JFK spoke about. The "American Experiment," as some like to call it. We cannot deny that it has some serious wrinkles in it that you would think we could have ironed out in 250 years ... that's two and a half centuries, people! And still, it's this sh\*\*?\* (BTW, if this is an "experiment," then what the hell does that make all of us? And why can't I find my way out of this maze ... I smell cheese ...)

I guess my point is, while I'm always up for a party, I'm just not sure what we're celebrating. I mean, July 4th falls on a Saturday this year, so it's not even a day off work. And our current leadership has pretty much gutted the original intentions of the 1776 crowd.

But we're gonna blow off a bunch of fireworks anyway, scare the crap out of my dog, and then all "ooooh" and "aaaah" as we listen to the news reports of how many DIY celebrators blew their fingers off this year. Aaaaah, the counting of the missing fingers ...



it really is a majestic tradition. Right up there with the swallows returning to Capistrano or the folks who, every November, set their garages on fire trying to deep-fry a turkey.

But I know you're asking yourselves, my devoted reader, "Why is this guitar player not writing about the club scene or the calluses on his fingers this month and instead ranting about our sweet land of liberty?" I guess it's that "idea" that John Kennedy spoke of that just got to me.

I really do love this country. And anyone can revel in its triumphs, but you have to really love your country to point out its failings. The people who founded the place taught me that.

*Continued on Page 16...*

An Interview

# Steve Paige (vocalist for Hope For Now)

by Rob Smittix

**RRX:** So is it Steve or Steven? What do you go by?

**SP:** Whatever, you know? Every day is different. I respond to both, so ...

**RRX:** I mean, it's your call.

**SP:** Steve's cool.

**RRX:** Alright, we'll go with Steve. Thank you for taking the time to talk to me. It was suggested by Mike Valente of Empire Underground and various other things that we reach out and talk to you guys. And that doesn't happen very often, just so you know. So I figured there must be a very good reason for that.

**SP:** I'm flattered and honored then.

**RRX:** Hope For Now is the band, and I agree with that. There is hope ... for now. I know you got a big show coming up on July 18th at Empire Underground. Tell us about that show. Who's playing with you, and what's going on?

**SP:** It's our first headlining show at Empire Underground. We're playing with Oceans & Ghosts, Eyes of Apathy, Iced Over, and Nice Try Kid.

**RRX:** Nice Try Kid, that's a cool band name. That's fun.

**SP:** I played with them a couple times. They're good dudes.

**RRX:** Nice. So, how would you describe your music?

**SP:** I mean, I always describe it as melodic metalcore. I grew up on Slipknot, Kill Switch Engage, and stuff like that. We all kind of come from different realms, but I describe it as melodic metalcore.

**RRX:** There are so many different subgenres of metal these days. God, I think there's probably more subgenres in metal than there are in anything else. I can't keep up. I just listen to what I listen to, and if it's melodic, even better. Now, I'm looking at the flyer for the show, it's kind of cool that I can read all of the band names. I like that.

**SP:** (Laughs) Yeaahhhhh! Who doesn't appreciate a good death metal font?

**RRX:** Some of those flyers, you need the "They Live" glasses to read.

**SP:** It could be troubling at times. I mean ... I was on a deathcore kick for like five years, so I kind of just grew accustomed to reading it, I guess.

**RRX:** So, as far as yourself and your bandmates, what do you do in the band? And who else do you got?

**SP:** I do vocals. I'm responsible for the yelling and the occasional singing. Evan Colon plays guitar, and he produces, mixes, and masters all of our music. Christian Colon, his brother, plays bass, and he also does all of our live sound engineering. He sets the tracks together, sets the click tracks and the backing tracks for the synthesizers, and stuff like that. He pretty much keeps us grounded and on task, and also kind of acts as a bit of a manager, which is very welcome. It takes a lot off everyone else's plate; he manages it pretty well. Then we have Kyle Frechette, he plays drums and listens to Hinder, and that's about what he does. And we have our band wife, Shelby Frechette; that's our drummer's wife. She does all of our merch. She does all of our designs and orders, stuff like that. It's just a ragtag group of peeps.

**RRX:** Yeah, that's such a great thing to have a band wife that's actually involved. And this goes for guys, too, if it's your wife's band, you know? You gotta pull the weight a little bit and help out with the merch and all that stuff; it's like an unwritten law. When we're done, I need to make sure I have everyone's name correct. I went to Albany High, I can't spell for s\*\*\*!

**SP:** Schenectady High graduate 2010, I feel it!

**RRX:** 2010 graduate?

**SP:** Oh yeah.

**RRX:** So, you're obviously a young man. Is it the same age group for the



rest of the band as well?

**SP:** Yeah, we're all within three or four years of each other.

**RRX:** So yeah, roughly about the same age. Because I know some of those groups out there have that one old guy. It doesn't sound like you do.

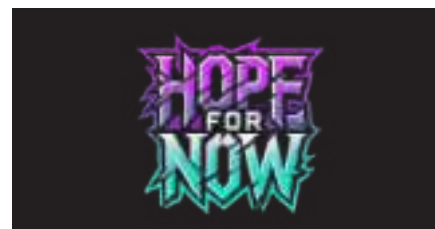
**SP:** Nope.

**RRX:** What music do you have out?

**SP:** We have our first EP on Spotify, YouTube, Apple Music, and everywhere that you get music. It's got a bunch of oldies on it. We have a couple of singles out, and then we're gearing up to release our first single as this lineup of members on July 18th or sooner to gear up for the headliner with a music video and all that.

**RRX:** Oh, nice. So basically, this show is also gonna be a release show for you.

**SP:** Yes. July 18th marks this new era of Hope For Now, and hopefully everyone likes it.



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**2... 3... 4...**

*Continued from Page 13..*

If you're just glossing over the shortcomings, hell, at this point, the outright misdeeds and illegalities, then I'm not sure you can call yourself a patriot. Patriots stand for something. Patriots speak out against tyrants. Patriots shout "NO!" when they see injustice.

As Little Steven declares again and again in his heroic anthem, "I Am a Patriot", "And the river opens for the righteous!" Preach, brother.

So God bless America on her birthday. And God bless all the people in it. All of them. Not just the ones we look like, or talk like, or think like, or love like. All of them. All of us. We are all Americans, endowed with inalienable rights and righteousness. And yes, when that river flows for the righteous, it flows through us all, as does that idea of freedom, liberty, and inclusion.

So take it easy on the fireworks this year 'cause you're freakin' out my dog. And if you blow off your middle finger, Homer, there goes half your vocabulary.

And whatta ya say we all be thankful and celebrate what we have, but also strive to make this a better, stronger, more inclusive place for everyone ... huh? So come on, let's count off together to the old girl's birthday (you guys who lost fingers to M80s last year can just stamp your feet), July 2...3...4th!



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**BACK**

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# Hope That Recognizes Suffering

by Larry Felton

Before Laura Beth Johnson and Sawyer Fredericks sit down to write together, they make a list. Not of chords or hooks, but instead, a list of the things they have in common. The practice, introduced by Johnson, sits at the heart of the EP they've been working on since August 2024.

Johnson, a Capital Region singer-songwriter, released her most recent EP, "Holy Now," in December of 2025. After winning the eighth season of *The Voice* in 2015, Fredericks has spent a decade building a catalog of folk-inspired music while based in the Capital Region. The duo's first released collaboration, "Stonewall," closed "Holy Now." By the time it came out, they already had three or four songs of their collaborative project finished — a record about, in Johnson's words, "a type of hope that recognizes suffering and continues in spite of it."

We met at my studio to talk about how their collaboration began, how they work together, and this EP they aren't ready to name — before I made some portraits.

**RRX:** Take me back to the moment you first connected musically.

**SF:** The first time I heard Laura was in Troy at Cafe Euphoria. She was performing, and there was a particular song that struck me — like, oh, this person's a really good songwriter, I want to work with them. The lyric was from a song about your grandmother's passing. "The castle of my childhood returns to sand." That was the line where I was like, oh yeah.

**RRX:** Laura, what did you know about Sawyer's music before that?

**LBJ:** Honestly, not much. The thing that got me was when Sawyer played "Funeral Parking Only" on acoustic at an open mic.

**RRX:** When did you start writing together?

**LBJ:** August 12th, 2024. I keep track.

**SF:** She's very organized. I'm not.

**RRX:** Working with someone is different than admiring them. What made the leap feel right?

**SF:** Shared values. That's one of the main reasons we collaborated. We have a lot of the same viewpoints, and we connect through that.

**LBJ:** It's also what makes our friendship so rich. One of the things I do at the start of a co-write — I had been doing it for a while before Sawyer — is make a list of what we have in common. You learn more about yourself, and more about the other person, when you think intentionally about that.

**SF:** I'd never done that before with anyone I was co-writing with. It was always, all right, what do we want to write about? But this was creating something we could be emotionally attached to. Finding common ground to write a song about. That was refreshing — and meaningful, because I love emotion in song.

**RRX:** Tell me about the project you're working on now.

**LBJ:** The project is about finding personal healing.

**SF:** A lot of my music has despair and sadness in it. What I wanted to create with Laura was something that had that, but is hopeful. About finding light in dark times and working through it.

**LBJ:** A type of hope that recognizes suffering and continues in spite of it.

**RRX:** What does a writing session look like?

**LBJ:** I have my iPad, we're sitting on a couch, and we just talk.

**SF:** We figure out what the other is feeling. There's a song we wrote called "Talk About It" that came from me saying I'd been thinking a lot about family — including family members who've passed — and Laura had been too. That sparked the whole session. We



find an emotion we were both feeling, and that's the foundation of the song.

**RRX:** Will this be duets, or are you bringing in a band?

**SF:** Probably just us. Maybe strings as backup. I do percussion on my guitar, so the percussion's covered. The ukulele (played by Johnson) covers the high end. The sound should sound very full as is.

**RRX:** How far along are you?

**SF:** We need to figure out when we'll record, and exactly how we want the songs produced. After that, it's album cover and announcing.

**RRX:** Have you been road-testing the material live?

**SF:** Yeah, we played a song at the in-the-round at Caffe Lena, and at one of Laura's Lena shows last year. We also tested one on socials — a minute-and-a-half song — and someone at the Eddies came up to us and said he'd listened to it a hundred times.

**RRX:** When will the EP be out?

**SF:** Hard to say. We both have our own music careers going. But I don't see us stopping writing. We're already co-writing songs that will come out under one of our names — not duets, just co-writes. This isn't a one-off.

**RRX:** Laura, what does Sawyer bring out in your songwriting that you don't

access on your own?

**LBJ:** Sawyer brings heart to everything they do. Writing with Sawyer challenges me to get to the heart of the song sooner, and to show up fully in the process.

**RRX:** Sawyer, same question back.

**SF:** Laura brings a more hopeful sense to my writing. Something I can't really do on my own. And structure — there are two types of artists, the kind with a million unlabeled voice memos, and the organized kind. Laura's the organized one.

**RRX:** You come from different lanes — Laura's confessional, Sawyer's Americana folk. Where do they meet?

**LBJ:** In the song. I come from a confessional poetry background. We have emotion-first values when it comes to writing.

**SF:** Music for the people. That's what folk music is. Stories you put time into telling, so people can connect.

**RRX:** What's something you've learned from each other that has nothing to do with music?

**LBJ:** The importance of loving on your people. Sawyer is a very loyal friend, and I strive to emulate that.

**SF:** Laura's also a very caring, loyal friend. Very gift-giving. It's inspired me — you can get your friends gifts.

# 3 Questions with Rees Shad

By Rob Skane

Over the course of a distinguished career, Rees Shad has established himself as a master storyteller whose songs blend literary depth with melodic craftsmanship. Working within the broad traditions of Americana, folk, and roots music, Shad creates richly detailed narratives that reveal both a keen observer's eye and a songwriter's instinct for emotional truth. His catalog reflects a lifelong commitment to the art of songwriting, where every lyric serves the story and every song invites a deeper listen.

Please visit [www.reesshadmusic.com](http://www.reesshadmusic.com)

**RRX:** What was the moment that made you pick up a guitar and never put it down?

**RS:** I actually put it down all the time. I like to pick up another instrument and make my brain bend so that the next time I pick up a guitar, I am approaching it with a different mentality. But you

were being facetious, weren't you? I was hanging out with my two best friends in 7th grade, thinking that perhaps we should stop playing air guitar and actually learn to play rock n' roll on real instruments. We went about saving our pennies until we had enough money to each buy an instrument. I had played piano since I was 5 or 6, and writing songs on it pretty much since the get-go, but my folks weren't gonna spring for an electric piano, so it was decided (by my pals) that I was gonna play guitar. I scratched together \$25 and brought it down to We Buy Guitars on 48th Street in NYC and bought myself a Magnatone Tornado Strat-like electric guitar. They didn't have a case for it, so I carried it home in a trash bag, worked out how to plug it into my parents' stereo system, and started working at figuring out how the thing could be played. About a year later, I got a Goya classical guitar and started bringing that everywhere with me ... so much easier

than dragging a piano around ... and girls seemed to dig sitting and listening, so I kept the guitar around and transitioned to writing songs on it. I have only recently come back to the piano in a serious way. Half the songs for the upcoming album are piano songs ... which means I now tour with guitars AND an electric piano. Ugh. So much for lightening the load in my old age.

**RRX:** If you could go back and tell your younger self one thing about playing guitar, what would you say?

**RS:** Turn it the f\*\*\* down!

Seriously? I'd advise myself to drop the pick and embrace the strings with my fingertips. It took me too long to make that shift, and it has made a huge difference in the subtlety that this instrument is capable of.

**RRX:** When you're not onstage or recording, what kind of stuff do you play

when no one's listening?

**RS:** Someone is ALWAYS listening! Even when I put the aluminum foil hat on. I like to pull out old sheet music and try to figure out what was going on in an old American Songbook-type song. Songs with changes that I normally wouldn't play through or write lyrics to. It stretches my consideration of what I can play with when I am composing. I'll also go online and try to teach myself a song that I've recently heard. Like, I have been working to learn Buddy Mondlock's "The Kid" this afternoon. Just so the next time I see him, I can maybe harmonize with him and play a solo that doesn't suck. But when I first start my warm-up routine, I almost always start playing swinging blues stuff. Kinda jazzy, kinda bluesy, with a bit of a bop feel to get my hands moving in different ways than I might normally have them move.



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*Continued from Page 59...*

So using that little alcoholism that I had, that was kind of a surrounding point, like, 'Oh sh\*\*. That's something really cool.' And I still continue that to this day. I just don't use Scotch. I use rubbing alcohol."

RRX: When viewers project their own narratives onto your abstractions, what does that teach you about the distance between who you are and how you are perceived?

AW: "I paint a lot of things black for a reason because I put bar epoxy on top of that, and when you put bar epoxy on black, it acts as a mirror, so the viewer acts as a part of the piece when they look at it. So every interaction you have with the painting is yours and yours alone. I kind of encourage finding your own way through what I painted. It's your own path."

RRX: Is there a recurring internal conflict that your paintings return to, even when you believe you've moved beyond it?

AW: "Oh yeah, absolutely. My lovely mother named me Alexander Aaron Waters. Alexander Hamilton, Aaron Burr. Aaron Burr shot Alexander Hamilton. That's literally what I was named after. She always knew there would be an internal conflict with me. I knew that growing up."

RRX: What does beauty mean to you when stripped of harmony, and why does disorder feel necessary for it to exist?

AW: "I think there is order in a lot of things that I paint because I create these weird rules and such. But I think that disorder is the natural state of being, so therefore the human condition is what I'm trying to get to. I think disorder is important to make beauty happen. Because without disorder, there is no order. It's just like that thing of suffering. I want to get to the opposite of this. How do I get there? Disorder, order, and finding a balance in between."

RRX: In moments when the world feels physically or emotionally exhausting, what compels you to continue rather than step away?

AW: "I feel like this is the way to process. It's the healthiest way, I think. When the world is exhausting, create something, and then the world feels a little bit brighter, right?"

One might say that's what makes Alex's work resonate with such psychological intensity. Buried within the abstraction, spill, and erosion exists a man attempting to negotiate with disorder in real time. Not to overcome it, nor even fully comprehend it, but to shape it long enough to coexist beside it.

And perhaps that's the uncomfortable truth pulsing at the core of his work: that meaning isn't discovered through the absence of chaos, but through our willingness to compose within it.



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An Interview:

# Rooftop Park In Focus

by Sara Busone

## Sara Busone chats with Andy Araya, aka Rooftop Park, about “Dannemora,” impromptu video shoots, performing live, and streaming services

**RRX:** So, Rooftop Park ... what was your inspiration for that name?

**AA:** I used to be a part of a band over 10 years ago. And I remember there was one day when all four of us were together in the same room, and we were trying to choose what name to call ourselves. And Rooftop Park was one of my suggestions. It ended up being a different name, but I kept that suggestion because I just thought it was good for something.

**RRX:** I like the imagery it suggests.

**AA:** Thank you. I really appreciate that.

**RRX:** I always think of a feral, overgrown forest on top of a giant skyscraper in the city. That's what comes to my mind.

**AA:** I love that so much.

**RRX:** So I know that you released “Dannemora” recently, which is an amazing song. And I remember you said you were inspired by the infamous prison break in upstate New York.

**AA:** Absolutely.

**RRX:** Tell me a little more about that.

**AA:** That song was written ... I think around October time ... around that time of the year. And I was watching a documentary about that exact same prison break. It was a little short television series that Ben Stiller made. And I remember watching that whole series and just saying to myself, “You know, this is such an interesting news story” when it happened, and just looking back on it, it's almost like it felt worthy of its own kind of song because of just how it fits in modern Upstate history. People remember that event.

**RRX:** Oh yes ...

**AA:** I've asked multiple people who live up near the Plattsburgh area about that, and it's always the same old, you know, sigh and “Yeah, I remember that.”

**RRX:** Yeah, it was a big, big deal. When you wrote the song, was it from a specific point of view?

**AA:** There are multiple points of view from the song

itself and the lyrics. There's a little bit of a narrator in the first verse saying they slipped through the cracks where the shadows go in ... it switches over to the prison breakers' perspective at some points where there are lines like, “They'll speak of our stories in the towns below.” There's definitely more than one perspective. It kind of zigzags.

**RRX:** Yeah, I get that impression from what I remember about the song. It's a great song. I really like it. And I really loved the video that you did in the alleyway up here in Troy.

**AA:** Oh, yes, thank you. That was for “Come And Go.” That was a fun one.

**RRX:** Yes, I really enjoyed it. What inspired you to film there?

**AA:** I just happened to be around that area. I was catching a concert at No Fun that night with two of my friends, who just so happened to be guest vocals on that song. So, after one set is done, we stepped outside, and I start bringing up to them the topic of shooting a video for that song. And we were saying things like, “Oh yeah, yeah, yeah ... we got to pick a day out to do that,” and, “I can't wait.” And there was another person in that conversation who just kind of stopped us and went, “Um, why don't we just do it right now?” And we all kind of looked at each other, and we're just like, “Yeah, why don't we? We're here!” “Yeah, we're here, and it's a pretty fun night, so why not just get something out of it?” And we did.

**RRX:** It looked like you spent a lot of time planning it out, but I love that it was just on the fly.

**AA:** Oh my God, (it) couldn't have gone any better, and that's just because of the people who I was with. The guest vocals on that song are by Alec Kaplan and Jordan Demaris. And shooting that video was so fun. My friend Emily was the one who filmed that music video, and it couldn't have gone any better.

**RRX:** Kudos to Emily. She did a great job.

**AA:** Absolutely.

**RRX:** What are your hopes, dreams, and visions for Rooftop Park? Moving forward, what would you love



to see happen? What are you working towards?

**AA:** I mean, right now, it's just playing to as big packed rooms as I can. I love playing live. That's probably my most passionate thing in this project. It's just ... the anticipation of like 10 minutes before the stage, you could feel your heart beating. And it's funny cause I've done this a thousand times, and I still get in that mindset of like, “All right, this is it.” And it's an interesting dragon to chase for sure, but I have multiple goals. Like I wanna play to the biggest packed house I can. There are some local acts around here that I would love to open for or collaborate with. And maybe even get us on a festival or two.

*Continued on page 62...*

*Continued from Page 7...*

But my plan on Record Store Day is that we will have a big sale on items that people want. We have two sales a year - one in the fall to celebrate the anniversary, and then one in the spring. I think the spring one will be on Record Store Day, so we will definitely have something special on that weekend.

**RRX:** Are there any changes within the store that you are looking into making, or considering selling any different merchandise that was sold here before?

**JK:** No, not really, but something we got in recently that I was skeptical about at first are Pokémon cards. A Pokémon rep came in and said they were looking for alternative outlets to sell cards, and they have been flying off the shelves. So we have them, and are open to stuff like that going forward. We also may sell stereo speakers at some point, as there's a demand.

**RRX:** Is there anything that you would like to say to our readers and the community at large, and let them know what to expect with the future of Last Vestige?

**JK:** Definitely pay attention to Facebook. Plus Instagram (@lastvestigemusic) and Tik Tok (@jims.vinyl.collect.). Keep your eyes out for our podcasts. And thanks for the support. Without the community, there would be no Last Vestige. It's incredible the customers that we have here. Kids, teens, people of all ages and backgrounds, and a lot of women of all ages buying vinyl. When I was working here at 19, there were few or no women buying vinyl, so it's great! So tell your friends!

*Continued from page 50...*

So that's really a special thing that we get to experience. And my son, who is 12 years old, actually accompanies me for most all of my shows. We've got a special relationship performing together. So, I don't know if it's necessarily one thing. The lifestyle is just really enjoyable, and being able to do it together as a family is really special to us all.

**RRX:** You're truly blessed. That's basically about it, man. We'll see you there, July 18th at Troy Savings Bank Music Hall. Was there anything that you maybe wanted to say to people, encourage them to come out?

**BV:** Yeah, the show will be a lot of fun. The music, although it's classic rock, we've got a lot of different types of variety within it. It is a family show, so I'd love to invite folks with kids: bring them along, they'll have fun. It's a very active, engaging show, and we've got a beautiful place to do it. So I appreciate the chance to be on the show, Rob, and look forward to seeing you and your listeners there in a couple of weeks.

**RRX:** Sounds amazing. And hey, I'll bring my kids and grandkids.



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# You? Me? The Dead?

by Rob Skane

I never "got" the Grateful Dead. I just didn't understand it. And I didn't want to – at all. For quite some time and with no shame whatsoever, I was VERY happy listening to albums like "KISS Alive!" to focus on anything but the sound of a Gibson Les Paul, electric rocknroll guitar, plugged into a very loud and very big Marshall amplifier. The LBP-1 power booster (i.e., the secret weapon) was often involved, too. But, when certain tunes from the Dead jumped out of the FM radio – always tuned to WOUR, the Rock of Central New York - I was all in, but I didn't know why. "Truckin'," "Sugar Magnolia," "Playing In The Band," "I Need A Miracle" - all the hits, I guess. It was somewhat "Top 40-ish" for the Dead. The sounds just resonated with me. I think it was Bob Weir's singing; I always liked the timbre of his voice. He sang in a very gentle and friendly way, like he just loved the songs and "playing in the band."

I felt sad when I was told of Bob Weir's passing. It hurt me, and I didn't know why – I still don't. Maybe because another important musician left the proverbial building? I couldn't tell you, kids. But, I do know this – in addition to having a very cool singing voice, Bob Weir was a stupendous rhythm guitar player. I have watched many bootleg videos since his passing, and seeing him play is mesmerizing. Jerry Garcia was fantastic, too. He'd be ripping leads and would never repeat the same lick during the course of a 3-hour gig or 3 days ... I mean, they played a LONG time, EVERY time. Check out Barton Hall, 1977 – dedicate an afternoon to that one. It's worth it.

My favorite aspect of Jerry Garcia's playing was the fact that he didn't make those stupid guitar player faces. He just connected to the music and let things rip. No posing, no frills; he probably changed strings every ten gigs for all I know. You can kinda get a vibe that he dug bluegrass music when you hear some of the things he played, especially on the "American Beauty" LP. I bet he listened to Django and Chuck Berry, too – and we all should. Although I never understood how they could have so much wattage onstage and still have, at least in my mind, such thin guitar sounds. Simmer down, I know that's a me problem. But the sounds were pure and real. Just like the music. I mean, they cared about the music so much that in 1974 they were lugging around a 75-ton sound system. Read that again: SEVENTY FIVE TONS. The bootlegs from that timeframe sound absolutely beautiful, too.

The Dead's music defined a time, a movement, and a counterculture. We all know about the Haight Ashbury stuff and the Ken Kesey stuff. There's no need to beat that into the ground. But, if you're not down, then you gotta go to school, kids. Google that sh\*\*, yo!! The Dead brought people together and gave them joy for decades. They freely let fans bootleg their performances so people could swap shows for years and years to come. It was a brilliant idea because it encouraged a spirit of community. Thankfully, those bootlegs are still in circulation for all of us to enjoy, if we're so inclined. The Dead wasn't magic onstage every night, no band is – but on the nights they were ... there was nothing like it. Here's the deal: music can move you, and you'll never know why – you don't need to know. Just listen, and if it moves you, that's an absolutely beautiful thing.



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An Interview:

# TESLA'S JEFF KEITH

by Jason Irwin

## STILL HAVING FUN 40 YEARS LATER

With Tesla set to hit SPAC (with Mötley Crüe and Extreme) on July 29, I caught up with frontman Jeff Keith to talk about touring after four decades, classic songs, new music, and why the band's success comes down to one simple thing: having fun.

**RRX's Jason Irwin:** Hi Jeff, so great to be speaking with you. I've been a fan for a long time.

**Tesla's Jeff Keith:** Awesome, well, thank you!

**RRX:** I was just on your website, and one of the first things it says is, "If you're looking for the car, you've come to the wrong place." I know why that's there. But do people really think the band has something to do with the car company?

**JK:** These days, kind of. People see the cars everywhere. We named the band after the inventor back in 1986, and I think the car company did too. That's why you've got to go to TeslaTheBand.com.

**RRX:** That's where you go for an earful of great rock and roll, then?

**JK:** Yeah, absolutely!

**RRX:** What's it like gearing up to go on tour after all these years?

**JK:** Forty years later, we're still going strong and still having fun. That's what it's all about. The people are still coming out, and we're very fortunate.

**RRX:** Are you seeing younger fans alongside the longtime fans?

**JK:** We do notice younger people in the audience, and that's really cool. They're checking the band out, and sometimes they're singing all the words. It's awesome that the songs have resonated for that long.

**RRX:** What's something that hasn't changed since the early days?

**JK:** Having fun and writing songs from the heart. We still love getting up on stage and making records. Songs can be timeless. You see people reliving moments from their lives when they hear certain songs, and we're feeding off that energy while they're feeding off ours.

**RRX:** What's something that's

completely different now?

**JK:** Social media and the internet. Everything goes through phones now. We're used to the older approach, and I don't really do a lot of social media, but the rest of the guys stay on top of all that. So, it's a little bit the same and a little bit different. It's certainly different coming out as a band now. Again, though ... just having fun.

**RRX:** Well, it sounds like having fun is still the key.

**JK:** It is. Let your hair down, forget about everything for a couple of hours, enjoy the music, and don't think about all the crazy things going on in the world.

**RRX:** The big tour with Mötley Crüe and Extreme is on deck. Then it looks like not much of a break before Rock in Paradise with Styx and a bunch of other bands. You are busy!

**JK:** We are, and we are very fortunate and grateful for that.

**RRX:** Is there a favorite tour memory that stands out?

**JK:** So many great acts. We did the whole Hysteria tour with Def Leppard. We went out with Poison, Great White ... a lot of memories. Going out with Mötley Crüe in 1989 was huge. That's when we found the club that let us play an acoustic set, which ended up leading to some pretty cool things later on, including our live album.

**RRX:** You have a new album coming out. Tell me about it.

**JK:** It's a covers album paying homage to a lot of the great singers and artists we grew up on. We also wrote an original song called "Never Alone" for it. We just wanted to have fun with it.

**RRX:** I just watched the video for the Queen classic, "Spread Your Wings." Your voice still sounds great after all these years. What's the secret?

**JK:** These days, I do some vocal warmups and things I never used to do. I don't really know. As long as the voice is there, and I can sing the songs, the guys tell me we're going out and playing. I've just been very blessed to have a voice that some

people tend to like. Mostly, I just sing from the heart.

**RRX:** Why do you continue putting out new music when a lot of veteran bands don't?

**JK:** We love writing songs. It's fun. Maybe we don't always have time to make a full album, but we've been putting out singles. We still love creating music and performing it live.

**RRX:** Will fans hear any of the new music on this tour?

**JK:** On the Mötley Crüe tour, probably not much. We only have so much time, so we've got to play the staple songs people know and love. And we absolutely embrace that. Putting together a set list is hard!

**RRX:** I've played in a band too, so I definitely understand that.

**JK:** Exactly!

**RRX:** Let's talk about some classic songs. Does "Modern Day Cowboy" still hold up today? It seems to have a lot of metaphorical significance.

**JK:** We're not really a political band, but I think it still holds up. That one went from cowboys with six-shooters, to gangsters in the '40s and '50s, to politicians with missiles. And it can be interpreted in different ways. Songs take people back to certain times in their lives. That's the beautiful thing about music. It's timeless.

**RRX:** I have a story about "Love Song." My wife walked down the aisle to the acoustic intro at our wedding. We got married in Saratoga Springs, where you'll be playing on our third wedding anniversary.

**JK:** Awesome, man. Glad to hear it - we are honored. Congratulations. Love always finds a way!

**RRX:** When did you realize how huge "Love Song" had become?

**JK:** We really didn't know. One thing we got a kick out of was hearing Casey Kasem introduce it at Number 7 on the countdown and call us "a band of nobodies out of nowhere." We thought it was great - because we were.

**RRX:** People interpret "Love Song" differently. Some hear a love song, some hear a breakup song, and others hear what they want to. What was your intention?

**JK:** That's the beautiful thing about songs. You leave the lyrics open so people can apply them to their own lives. To me, it's a healing song. Things work out. If something ends, something else will come along. But people can take it however they want.

**RRX:** You don't mind different interpretations?

**JK:** Not at all. That's what the music is for, in my opinion.

**RRX:** How do you feel about one of your biggest hits being a cover song like "Signs"?

**JK:** I love it. As I mentioned before, we started playing it acoustically while touring with Mötley Crüe. It was a song I remembered from when I lived in Oklahoma in the early '70s. I suggested it, and it was actually hard to track down a physical copy. Eventually, I found it on a 45, we learned it, we started performing it, and people embraced it. Long-haired freaky people man ... and we're still long-haired freaky people!

**RRX:** Did you have any idea that it would blow up to become such a big hit?

**JK:** No. You never know what's going to hit and what's going to miss. It just connected with people.

**RRX:** Fans still love "Little Suzi" too.

**JK:** That's another one. You can take a cover and put your own stamp on it. People seem to enjoy that.

**RRX:** I asked fans if they had any questions. One wanted to know if there are plans for a box set or unreleased material.

**JK:** Brian Wheat or Frank Hannon would know better than I would. I don't know of anything right now, but I think it would be cool if we did. We are seeing a lot of interest in vinyl these days, too.

**RRX:** Technology has certainly changed things. Sharing music is a lot easier now than hunting down cassette tapes.

**JK:** Absolutely. I'm old school, but I understand the new school way. Streaming and downloads can get music out to people quickly. If it helps people hear and enjoy the music, that's great.

**RRX:** One last fan question. What was the inspiration behind "Heaven's Trail (No Way Out)"?

**JK:** Ah. You know what? A lot of people think being in a rock band means you're



a star, and you've got no lows, you've got it made, and life is perfect. The truth is, we're people just like everyone else. We have highs and lows. The song is about getting through life with the help of a higher power and realizing we're all in this thing together.

**RRX:** Jeff, thanks so much for taking the time. I'll be seeing you in Saratoga on July 29.

**JK:** Sounds good, Jason. I'll look for you, buddy.

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An Interview:

# Jeff Manion (Guitar) Faded Line

by Rob Smittix

(Phone Rings)

**RRX:** Alright, looks like we're in business.

**JM:** Cool.

**RRX:** I reached out to my good friend Vegas, and I was like, hey man, we gotta talk to Faded Line because I know you got an album coming out, and also the release party that's gonna be at Empire Underground. It's also the halfway to the Extreme Music Awards, the EMAs, which we're involved with as well ... so I was like, no offence, Vegas, but I've interviewed you way too many times, and I would like the chance to talk to one of the founding members of your band. And he's like, Jeff's the guy. So here we go.

**JM:** I'm the only founding member (laughs).

**RRX:** Well, there you go.

**JM:** It's been it's a long haul, that's for sure. Just before I called you, I had to go back into Facebook and try to figure out through my page how long it's actually been. One of the oldest pictures I can find is from May of 2019; that was probably around the time when it really started to get kind of serious. But I think I started this thing probably in 2018, I would say. So it's been ... what's that, eight years or something like that?

**RRX:** Yeah, in that ballpark. So you guys existed a little while without Vegas.

**JM:** Yeah, we did. We had another singer for a bit there; his name was Frank Smith. He was a local guy. I didn't know him. He was a little bit younger than me. He was in the scene, probably the generation after me, here in Western Mass. We had a couple different drummers along the way as well.

**RRX:** You guys got a solid lineup right now.

**JM:** This is the best it's ever been,

yeah, 100%. And I'm completely thrilled with what we have accomplished over the last few years.

**RRX:** I love the music, but also Vegas is like the frontman of frontmen.

**JM:** He's great; he was introduced to me by Mike Valente, who I'm sure you know very well.

**RRX:** I sure do, he's an ass\*\*\*\*

**JM:** (Laughs) Yeah, he's an ass\*\*\*\*, but he's a great guy. And if you know him that well, you know that they both go hand in hand. He introduced me to Vegas, which was a freaking blessing, you know? Vegas and I, artistically, have worked very well together, and we've also become very close personally. I'm definitely fortunate to know him.

**RRX:** Yeah, he's a good guy to have on your team for sure. So ... the new album that's coming out, tell us about that.

**JM:** The new album that's coming out, we've been working on it for close to a year now. I'm sure you probably know Walter "Monsta" as well.

**RRX:** Yes, I do.

**JM:** Best drummer in the business and a carbon copy of what I said about Vegas, you know what I mean? We've become very close personally as friends; he's one of the nicest guys you're ever gonna meet. He's been around for a couple of years now, maybe a little less than two years. When he joined the band, we had just released an EP with our other drummer, George Shetterly.

**RRX:** Mhm.

**JM:** We were getting ready to write some new stuff, and I had some things already in the tank, ready to go. We also recycled a few old songs from our very first release that we put out, but they are basically dissections, though. We took some riffs here and there, put them together, and changed it around. And bringing Walter in really changed things in that dynamic as well, as far as



building the songs and arranging the arrangements. It's all good stuff, man. I'm excited.

**RRX:** Talk about experience, I don't even know how Monsta juggles as much as he does, but he does.

**JM:** Yeah, I get the same thing from people. They always say to me, "We don't understand how you do it." People that I barely know, who just see me on Facebook because I play in another band from New Jersey, Silence Equals Death. And Carlo, my bass player in Faded Line, he's also in Silence Equals Death. So, we're juggling a lot, too, but I'll tell you, it's worth it. It really is.

**RRX:** Definitely, but I mean ... we ain't no spring chickens anymore, you know? We got kids, and some of us got grandkids and stuff like that, but to still be able to make the time to do what you love so much is a blessing.

**JM:** Yeah, I mean ...

(Call drops)

**RRX:** I think I lost you. You there? If you can hear me, I'm gonna call you back.

(Phone rings and Jeff picks up)

**RRX:** I always say we're in business, but now we're back in business!

**JM:** I don't know where we left off, but yeah ... music, the hardcore scene in general, has been a huge part of my life.

There's even the guys in my other bands and friends in other bands that we collaborate with all over the place. Faded Line has been fortunate to play quite a bit down in the New York City area, New Jersey, we've been out to DC, Pennsylvania ... not much out in eastern Massachusetts. Western Mass has always been a part of the Albany scene. Like when I was a kid, us guys over here, we were always over in Albany. We were always at the QE2. We were at Saratoga Winners, you know? A lot of those guys, I remember from back then, like Valente when he was in Attica and some of the older guys... Joel from Intrusive, I remember him from back in the day. There's people our age everywhere in this scene that are still passionate and going strong with it. I just think it's a way of life for us. Hopefully, these young guys will be doing it when they're our age, too.

**RRX:** I hope so, man. I wonder about these young kids. A lot of them just like to stay home and lock themselves in the room with some video games.

**JM:** It's hard to get people out to shows sometimes. We have a good product, though; people will come. But I've heard comments here and there, you know? Like, "That's an old guy show..." Well, the old guys are the ones that paved the way for you young guys, so... I don't remember having that mindset, but I'm not gonna judge anyone.

*Continued on page 62...*

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An Interview

# Michael Hallisey (WVCR DJ)

by Rob Smittix

**RRX:** I've been doing this thing where I talk to DJs from other radio stations across the region. I knew that you started doing a show over at 88.3 WVCR The Saint, so I thought it'd be a great time to chat. How long have you been there?

**MH:** At a year this month.

**RRX:** How's the experience been so far?

**MH:** It's been a learning experience. I've never done radio. I didn't do radio in college either. This was just an opportunity that was presented to me last year. It's been a great experience so far.

**RRX:** That's pretty cool. I've been in radio since 1994. I worked at most of the companies that are around here in some shape or form at one point in time. I find it very interesting when new people are coming up, when people are brand new to it. Here at RadioRadioX, I mean ... we have Jimmy Barrett, he's got more experience than anybody. He's been at it for almost 60 years with Kaleidoscope, and we have others who also have a lot of experience. But ... there's nothing like throwing somebody new into the mix that has absolutely never done it before. Just seeing the energy and attention that they give it for the first time around. That's why I'm excited for you. It's a good feeling to be on air.

**MH:** It absolutely is, and you make a great point. I'm a rookie. I'm an amateur. This is volunteer work. I don't get paid for it. It's just something that I do because I grew up loving the magic of radio. Right?

**RRX:** For sure.

**MH:** John Garabedian, Open House Party ... in our market, I think he came on the air Sunday nights, when I was a kid.

**RRX:** Sounds about right, yeah.

**MH:** I would listen to that every Sunday night. I just loved that energy. I think there's a kid out there now that has rekindled that spirit of his and is doing a show. It's beautiful to just hang out in your bedroom, listen to the radio, and have the DJ select a song you didn't realize you needed to hear, right? It's a song that you either pulled out of your memory, you didn't remember it until just that moment, or you're feeling a feeling and this song just speaks to you at this hour. It's just fate, and it's beautiful, and that's why I like doing what I do. The folks you talked about, Barrett and yourself ... so many of the folks that have been on the radio for so many years ... these are the people who I try to not necessarily emulate (because I can't), but I at least try to listen to the radio, and it's like homework for me now. It's like ... when did they say this? Why did they say this? What are they saying before the break, or how are they doing the segues? I'm paying attention to all the nuances because I didn't go to school for this, not professionally, so I have to do it in some way or form just to play the part and do something that appeals to our listeners when I'm on the radio. So that's just the mindset that I bring to it.

**RRX:** Well, one of the things that I tell people when they've never done it before is ... I stole this from the Reese's commercial, but there's no wrong way to eat a Reese's. Like, it does not have to necessarily have to be structured in a way that other people are doing it. You just have to be yourself is the absolute main thing. I'll tell you this, too - I've only been on commercial radio, but even when I was on those stations (with the exception of just monitoring what we were doing), I always only listened to college radio. It was always WVCR, WRPI, and WCDB. The unique thing that college radio DJs get to do, and fortunately, I get to do that here too ... but on regular FM/AM stations that are owned by the big corporate conglomerates, none of those DJs get to play what they want.

**MH:** Right.

**RRX:** Getting to pick your own music, that's a wonderful luxury that a lot of DJs don't get.

**MH:** Oh, it's great. I think the win for me is, I'll hear it from my wife, or I'll hear it from Darrin Scott (Director). They'll be listening to the show, and they'll be like ... is this guy local? Or is this band local? Yes, they are, and to your point ... I'm preaching to the choir here, but we have one of the best music scenes in the country. It's full of talent and resources, too, to support them. The music that comes out of this scene is incredible, and to be able to share it on a radio station that's also on the iHeartRadio Network, that's great. And so it gives me the opportunity to share some music that the audience hasn't heard yet and introduce them to a band that has immense talent. And so, like when they say, "Oh, I don't listen to the radio," or "I don't like Top 40, it sounds like it's a formula," well then listen to your local music. I mean, these folks are out playing the small venues, the bars, and you're talking over them while you're hanging out with friends. Pay attention to what they're doing because they've got good stuff to listen to.

**RRX:** They sure do. I think sometimes the musicians around here kinda forget how vibrant it actually is here. Albany, the Capital Region, has always had a kind of complex because we're the Capital and New York City is our big brother, so people have always tried to compare. There's no comparison to New York City. I don't care if it's Chicago or LA. New York's comparable to Hong Kong. It's an entirely different monster.

**MH:** You and I grew up here, so we both recognize the inferiority complex that we have, where some people call it Smallbany, right?

**RRX:** I hate that!

**MH:** And I remember still the marketing video that they still circulate online when Crossgates Mall first opened. "We're in between New York, Montreal, Boston, and Buffalo." Like that's the selling point. Like we're here in the middle of these four larger cities, and that's the only selling point that we have. No, it's not, come on now.

**RRX:** Here's the thing that I always tell people: go travel throughout the United States. You'll come back with a better appreciation of what we have right here. Well, we're getting close to time. Is there anything else you'd want to add?

**MH:** If you are tired of the Top 40, if you're tired of the formula that you recognize in contemporary music today, you really got to give the local music scene a shot.

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# Music Notes

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## Who Is the Greatest Guitarist of All Time?

Who is the greatest guitarist of all time is one of the most dangerous questions in music. It can start a friendly conversation, divide a band, ruin a Thanksgiving dinner, or cause three grown adults in a music store to point at each other while someone in the background plays the opening to "Sweet Child O' Mine" slightly out of tune.

The problem is not that the question is bad. The problem is that the question is incomplete.

When someone asks, "Who is the greatest guitarist?" the real answer should probably be, "Greatest at what?" Greatest songwriter? Greatest performer? Greatest technician? Fastest player? Most influential? Best tone? Best feel? Best rhythm player? Best lead player? Best at making one note sound like it has lived a full and difficult life? These are all different questions, and each one may lead us to a different answer.

If we only measure speed, we can find players who are terrifyingly fast. There are guitarists who can pick one string at ridiculous speeds. There are players who can make a metronome question its career choices. That is impressive, and speed is a real skill. But if the definition of "greatest guitarist" becomes "who can pick one string twice as fast as everyone else," then we have reduced music to a sporting event involving a tiny piece of plastic and a deeply stressed wrist.

Music needs more. A guitarist can be fast and forgettable. A guitarist can be technically advanced and still not move anyone. A guitarist can play 9,000 notes and somehow say less than another guitarist says with one bend. That is the mystery. The greatest guitarist is not simply the fastest guitarist, the most famous guitarist, the guitarist with the hardest solo, the biggest amp, the

longest hair, the loudest pants, or the most dramatic face while bending the G string.

Greatness seems to live somewhere in the balance. At Peak Music and Dance, we might look at greatness through three major categories: technical ability, songwriting or musical creation, and performance. Those three together tell us much more than speed alone.

First, technical ability must be high. This does not mean every great guitarist has to play like a machine from the future. It means the guitarist has command of the instrument. They can do what they intend to do. They have control over tone, timing, bends, vibrato, rhythm, articulation, phrasing, dynamics, and feel. Technique is not just speed. Technique is control.

This is why someone like Eddie Van Halen matters so much. Yes, Eddie had technical firepower. The tapping, the harmonics, the tremolo bar, the speed, the wild vocabulary — all of it changed the electric guitar. But Eddie was not great only because he could play difficult things. He was great because the difficult things sounded musical, exciting, joyful, dangerous, and alive. He did not just have technique. He had electricity.

The same is true in a very different way with Eric Clapton. Clapton is not usually discussed as the fastest guitarist. That was never the point. His greatness lives in phrasing, tone, blues vocabulary, songwriting, and emotional delivery. His playing reminds us that the guitar is not only a machine for notes. It is an instrument for expression. One guitarist may impress the brain. Another may hit the heart. The greatest do both.

Second, songwriting must be present at a high level. This is where the conversation gets really interesting.

A guitarist can be a brilliant instrumentalist and still not create songs that last. Another guitarist may not be the most technically advanced player in the world, but they write parts that become part of history.

Think about the guitarists whose riffs, solos, and songs are instantly recognizable. Jimmy Page did not merely play guitar. He helped build songs, arrangements, riffs, textures, and atmospheres that shaped rock music. Jimi Hendrix did not merely play lead guitar. He reimagined the electric guitar as a voice, a storm, a machine, a rhythm section, and a psychedelic orchestra. Tony Iommi created riffs that helped define heavy metal. Keith Richards gave rock and roll some of its most durable rhythm guitar language. Brian May created guitar parts that sounded orchestral, melodic, and unmistakably his own.

Songwriting is where guitar leaves the practice room and enters the world. A scale is not a song. A lick is not always a song. A technical exercise is not always a song. But a riff people remember for fifty years is something else. If the guitar part becomes part of the culture, if people recognize it from two notes, if it makes people sing, move, dance, remember, or feel something, that guitarist has done more than demonstrate skill. They have created meaning.

Third, performance must electrify a crowd. This is the part that is hard to measure, but everyone knows it when they see it. Some guitarists do not just play the instrument. They become a force on stage. Angus Young is a perfect example. If we are measuring stage energy, commitment, and crowd impact, Angus has to be in the conversation. The schoolboy outfit, the duckwalk, the movement, the attitude,

the sound, the commitment to the riff — it is all part of the performance. He does not just play AC/DC songs. He becomes the physical embodiment of that music.

Eddie Van Halen also belongs here. Eddie did not simply perform difficult guitar parts. He made difficulty look like joy. He smiled. He moved. He connected. He made the impossible seem like it had just occurred to him while having the time of his life. That kind of performance changes how people experience music.

We can also look beyond guitar to understand this. Chopin was not just a composer, locked away writing beautiful piano music. He was known as an electrifying performer in his own world. His playing, touch, nuance, and presence mattered. Elvis Presley is another useful example. Elvis could play guitar, but do we call Elvis one of the greatest guitarists of all time? Usually, no. His greatness was not primarily guitar greatness. His greatness was performance, voice, charisma, style, cultural force, and the ability to electrify an audience. The guitar was part of the image and part of the music, but it was not the main reason people call Elvis great.

That distinction helps us. A person can be a great performer who plays guitar without being one of the greatest guitarists. A person can be a great technician without being one of the greatest musical artists. A person can be a great songwriter without being the most technically advanced player. But when high-level technique, songwriting, and electrifying performance all come together, that is when the "greatest guitarist" conversation becomes serious.

Of course, many names belong somewhere in this discussion. Given the length of this article, we cannot mention everyone.

*Continued on Page 43...*



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An Interview

# WAR-TIME MANNER

by Rob Smittix



**RRX:** We know the band has been around for quite some time, but if you could give us an abridged version of your history.

**Dan:** War-time Manner actually started in '87. We were called DDT and played a show at The Cozy Too in North Central Troy with Dead End. We were jamming one day, and Thom Sage walked in and said "I'm your singer, done deal!" Years later, no one was happy with the bands we were in, and we wanted a heavy, angry band, so we all quit our bands and got Thom Sage again. The rest is history.

**RRX:** We all get a little support from those around us. And we can also be impressed by our fellow performers. Who do you admire in your community, and why?

**Akim:** I've always felt that Bob Riley from Stigmata and Mike Trash from The Erotics got things done. From being frontmen ... until this day, touring and securing labels.

**Dan:** I'm impressed lately with all the local bands. I love it when people care about what they are doing. It's carried the local scene, and we wouldn't be playing if they hadn't kept the scene up.

**RRX:** Every artist's first song is a milestone. But so is the latest song. Describe the first song/album you recorded, and also the latest song/album you recorded; what are the differences?

**Dan:** We recorded so much in the early days. I think the first thing we recorded was "Freedom Is Not Free," live 2-track at Ted Hyland's studio in Albany. Recently, we've been working on a new CD. We've grown as musicians a lot, thanks to Leo Curley; our new music will reflect that.

**RRX:** What does Troy-Core mean to you?

**Thom:** Troy-Core seems to be varied in several opinions depending on who you ask. It was a form of unity of the first run of hardcore sounds coming out of Troy, New York. Still hanging on to old metal and rock tones, yet influenced by NYHC and punk. Just a bunch of kids doing our own versions of what we wanted to hear. The Troy-Core labeling was a positive vibe, but also dampened growth outside the Capital District. There is no actual crew or gang, but more of a family tie between individuals ... it's been burned in my musical foundation. I also consider such bands

as the mighty Cutthroat, One King Down, and Withstand, to name a few ... It's exciting how downright heavy the sounds are evolving in this new era of extreme music. As for me, I'm just thankful to be a small part of it.

**Akim:** Troy-Core means Cranial Abuse, Final Terror, Dead End, Rude Awakening, and Direct Attack.

**RRX:** August 1st at Slidin' Dirty, you've got a gig lined up. Give us some details on this show and what we are to expect.

**Thom:** We chose Slidin' Dirty for its location and size. We're looking to have a local party with good food and family vibes, also where new people are welcomed. I'd like my co-workers and non-scenesters to feel invited. We are not trying to take over the scene again, but just share some new work. Personally, it's letting my bandmates get a nut. I prefer my public privacy. Thanks to the WTM for allowing me to hold them back from the real opportunities we've had due to my under-the-radar point of view. I am nobody, and so are you. It's about the live shows and the memories, not a podium.

**Dan:** August 1st at Slidin' Dirty, expect a lengthy set, lots of merch... we will have hot sauce and a new spice rub, amongst other things!

**RRX:** Lastly, how does it feel to still be able to make the music you love and perform?

**Leo:** At my age, it's a gift to be able to write and perform extreme music. Watching friends pass away who I used to perform with makes every rehearsal and song mean a whole lot more. I know I used to take it for granted.

**Dan:** I'm extremely thankful after all these years that I can still do it, and more importantly, that people are still interested. It means everything.


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*Continued from Page 39...*

Guitar fans will bring up Buckethead, Zakk Wylde, Dimebag Darrell, Yngwie Malmsteen, Steve Vai, Joe Satriani, Randy Rhoads, Slash, Mark Knopfler, John Petrucci, and many others. These players are extraordinary, and in certain categories, some of them may rank near the very top. If the category is precision, speed, composition, metal riffing, tone, stage presence, influence within a genre, or technical innovation, many of those names deserve serious respect.

But that is exactly the point. A single category is not enough. If we define greatness only by speed, we may end up with someone most listeners have never heard of. If we define it only by flash, we may miss feel. If we define it only by fame, we may miss musicianship. If we define it only by difficulty, we may miss songwriting. The question becomes silly if we isolate it too far. "Who is the best guitarist?" cannot simply mean, "Who can pick the first string the fastest?" That may be athletic. It may be impressive. It may even be world-record impressive. But music is not only a race.

That is why names like Jimi Hendrix, Eddie Van Halen, Jimmy Page, Eric Clapton, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Jeff Beck, David Gilmour, Brian May, Prince, Tony Iommi, Ritchie Blackmore, Carlos Santana, and Angus Young keep returning to the conversation. They do not all win the same category. That is the point.

Hendrix may be the greatest example of imagination, influence, performance, and guitar-as-universe. Eddie may be the greatest example of technical revolution combined with joy, songwriting, and stage electricity. Clapton may be one of the greatest examples of blues phrasing, tone, taste, and songwriting presence. Page may be one of the greatest examples of riffs, production, arrangement, and rock mythology. Stevie Ray Vaughan may be one of the greatest examples of power, feel, tone, and physical command. David Gilmour may be one of the greatest examples of melody, space, tone, and emotional patience. Angus Young may not be the most technical guitarist in history, but if the metric is crowd energy, commitment, and rock-and-roll electricity, he can run across the stage, duckwalk through the argument, and win the room before anyone finishes the question.

So who is the greatest? It depends on what we are measuring. And that is not a weak answer. That is the honest answer. Great guitar playing is not one thing. It is a balance of ability, creation, and communication. Technical ability means the guitarist has command of the instrument. Songwriting means the guitarist creates music that matters beyond the exercise. Performance means the guitarist can deliver that music in a way that reaches people.

That is the triangle: technique, songwriting, and performance. The greatest guitarists usually live somewhere near the center of that triangle. They can play. They can create. They can move people.

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The greatest guitarist of all time may always be argued about, and honestly, that is part of the fun. But the better question for a student is not only, "Who is the greatest?" The better question is, "What makes them great?"

Because once we answer that, we stop arguing like fans and start listening like musicians. We hear the technique. We hear the songwriting. We hear the performance. We hear the choices. We hear the sound of someone turning wood, wire, fingers, electricity, and imagination into something people remember.

That is greatness. And like the voice, like EQ, and like timing, it is not magic. It is something we can study, even if we still reserve the right to argue about it loudly after rehearsal.

**NOTE:** Thanks to Fred Preston for catching Jeff's error on the release date of the Allman Brothers' "Eat a Peach." The album was released on February 12, 1972. Not January. Not March. February. Thanks, Fred. The right information matters, especially when the record is this good.



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# The Vindys Move Into New Territory

by Sara Busone

Sara Busone chats with Jackie Popovec from The Vindys to discuss the evolving sound in their new album, "Trap Door", the new tour, getting their music video screened at Tribeca and more

**RRX:** So before we get started, I am a huge fan. I saw you guys open for Fantastic Cat a couple of years ago in downstate New York on the beach. That was so fun! Thank you for taking the time to interview with me.

**JP:** Oh yeah! Thank you! This is really cool. I'm glad that our travels up to New York have been for something! I've met a lot of cool people up at the beach house there.

**RRX:** Oh, that's awesome! So the new album... congratulations! I know it just came out in April. I read in a recent interview that you were more "inbox" focused with this album. So you're kind of focusing on not just perfecting songs in public but rather, trying to recreate the magic of your live sound in the studio. I was wondering if you could expand a little bit.

**JP:** Yeah, it's something that we've always been told by our fan bases. "Hey I love your music when I hear it... but you guys live is a whole other level." So I have always been chasing what we can do in the studio to elevate the sound and make it an experience where people want to come and listen to our stuff not just in a live setting, but also they want to replay the one or two songs over and over and over again. And to me that was something that was important when we started in the studio. Me and my producer Mike Estock from Court Street Recording Studios, who is literally two blocks from my house, sat down and we really tore apart each of these songs and discussed what we wanted sonically out of each of these songs. So what you're gonna hear on the production of the album is going to be a little bit different than what you're gonna hear in a live space and we're OK with that.



Photo by Brian Herman

**RRX:** Yeah, I definitely would attest to that. I just think that's a really cool angle that you're going with. So you had that big Pat Benatar tour, 2024 and 2025, I believe. It was like a two-year schedule. And you said that you guys have more freedom now to go to new places that that tour took you on. So, the tour kicked off in May. What are some of the places you're excited to revisit?

**JP:** Yeah, so, some of the cities that we will be revisiting from the couple of tours that we have been we are very excited about visiting... but doing it in our own capacity is going to be sort of an experiment to see how many of those audience members that we gained a following from are going to come out to the shows. So this is kind of new territory for me, in some capacities, but in others it's kind of just building off of the momentum that we have already built for the last 10 years. This band, and everything that we have done has just been building that fan base, one

person at a time. I feel like everything's gonna happen at once. I'm very much excited to get these rolled out and, and also a little anxious because I really need to get my logistics in order.

**RRX:** Sure, that makes sense. It's all very, very exciting. One thing that I remember hearing was, I think you, there was a recording of you playing live. The song "Bugs"... the video got a nod, an entry at the 2023 Tribeca Film Festival, which I thought was so cool. Was getting one of your videos a Tribeca nod on your bucket list?

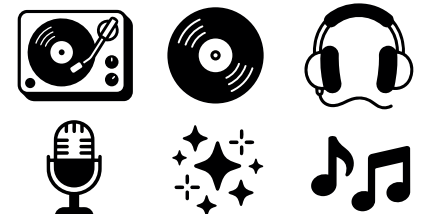
**JP:** Absolutely not, but it was definitely probably on the bucket list of our director, Peter John Campbell! Because he had not told me that he applied, and when he called me he was like, "Are you sitting down?" I'm like, "what happened?" He goes, "I applied for Tribeca. And we weirdly got it. I wasn't gonna tell you, but we got it". And, it was pretty insane to be one of only 8 music videos that were chosen.

I think this was like the first year in 2023 that they decided to involve music videos and so this is among, a couple of nationals like Lizzo and the Black Keys... and then some international ones and for us, you know, this band who's been doing it the way that we've been doing it on a low budget... to have our tiny little music video make it to the big one of the biggest stages of film is just unheard of, and immediately I said, "what am I gonna wear on the red carpet?"

**RRX:** That's what I would wonder too!

**JP:** What am I gonna wear and what if and if I'm going to meet Robert De Niro!

Continued on page 55..



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# Mea Culpa Meat Loaf

By Art Fredette

In the summer of 1977, I was 10 years old and trapped every weekend on a drum and bugle corps bus. My sister had decided she wanted to be in the color guard, and the family was all in for the journey, or sentence. The headiness of the Bicentennial had faded, and all we were left with were horrible clothes and AM radio. From the wasteland of AM gold, Meat Loaf roared onto the airwaves with "Bat out of Hell." For better or worse, this was the soundtrack of that summer.

I clearly remember bouncing along the highways of Upstate New York while every teenage girl on the bus sang along to "Two Out Of Three Ain't Bad" at the top of their lungs and out of key, and I prayed for a fiery crash. Sticky vinyl seats in the August heat exasperating the torture with every off-bleated chorus echoing from the rear of the rolling metallic tube. And on top of it all, insult to injury, all of this in the shadow of Elvis dying. I decided right then and there to HATE Meat Loaf the singer forever. I still kinda like the meal.

The years passed, and I survived the summer of '77, discovered new bands and sounds, and sort of forgot Meat. Then, I started to mobile-DJ, and he was back! Back with a vengeance - every weekend, without fail, someone would request "Paradise by the Dashboard Light." Could I ever escape this album? Was I trapped forever in Jim Steinman's overblown theatrical purgatory of excess? At least it wasn't "Celebration" by Kool and the Gang. But still ... really?

But time passes, and tastes change, past traumas fade (drum corps weekend excursions), and old convictions fade. So cold and lonely on a deep dark night, I took the time to revisit the Meaty one and the album that made him. I will admit that his performance in "Rocky Horror" had helped to soften my resistance. With headphones on, so no one will know my sin, I dropped the needle on the record. Would I be reviled, would my ears bleed, would the Ramones crawl out of my closet and beat me with broken guitar strings for the sin I was committing? Maybe, but nothing ventured, etc.

When the album ended, I was still alive and, dare I say, impressed. The damn thing was near perfect, and why wouldn't it be? Todd Rundgren was the producer, and members of the E Street Band were all over it. Meat Loaf, for all his excess, was perfect in his delivery, and his theatrical bent gave the songs the life they deserved. This was pure over-the-top excess, and I loved it. I did say the record was "near" perfect. Six of the seven tracks on this record move smoothly within the theme and flow with an odd grace. The only sore thumb is "Paradise"; it lacks the Hammer movie majesty of the rest of the LP. If it were left off, "Bat Out of Hell" would have been a rock opera to be reckoned with.

I guess what it all comes down to, in the end, is even a music snob like myself can eventually and begrudgingly admit that sometimes what we believe sucks ... doesn't. So bless me, Father, for I have sinned. I have listened to Meat Loaf, and I liked it. Sort of. Now say five "Sweet Janes" and five "Satisfactions" and sin no more.



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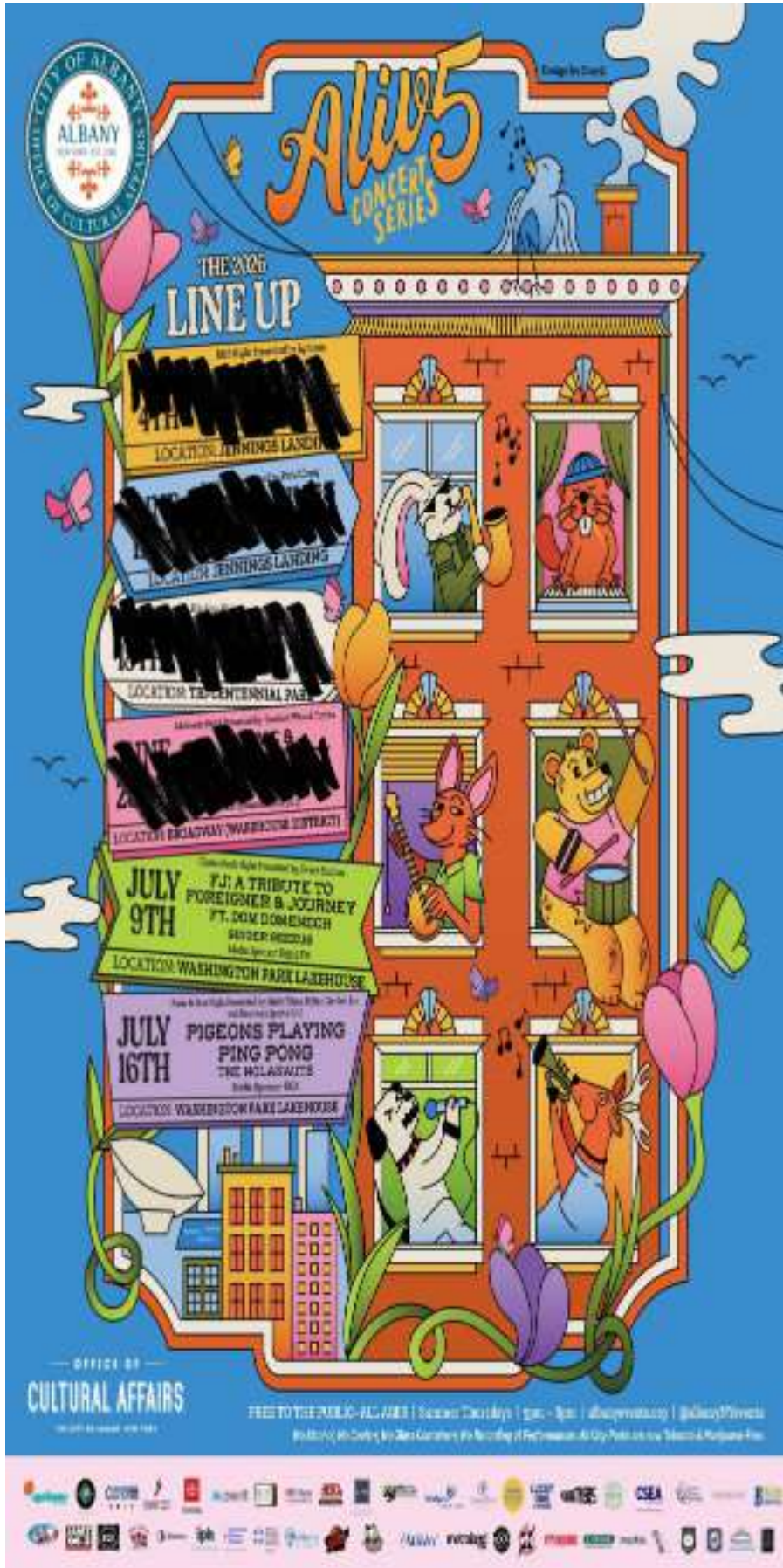
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An Interview

# Blue Violin (Chris Vuk)

by Rob Smittix

**BV:** Thanks for setting this up.

**RRX:** I'm glad we got you. Blue Violin, and it's Chris Vuk, pronounced?

**BV:** Vook

**RRX:** OK, so you can actually play the name game with your full name. Chris Vuk, banana fana fo Fook, you could do that.

**BV:** Yeah, we did it when I was a kid.

(Both Laugh)

**RRX:** Well, thanks for doing this. We love our beloved Troy Savings Bank Music Hall. Seeing that you were coming July 18th, I thought ... it'd be really cool to use that as an excuse to talk to you, and here we are.

**BV:** Awesome.

**RRX:** I do see that the tour is the Thunderstruck tour, and that's a classic rock tribute. Can you tell us a bit about what we would expect?

**BV:** Yeah, so I've been taking this tour all around the world for the last year and a half. We were at the Sydney Opera House a couple weeks ago. We were at the Iceland Harpa Concert Hall, Asia, and all throughout Europe. Actually, we're just kicking off this weekend in Maine, and yeah, on July 18th, we'll be at the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall. The concert is the classic rock show, and I have some of the best classic rock songs in this program. We've got "Thunderstruck," of course, that's the namesake of the show. We've got "Hotel California," we've got some Led Zeppelin, "Stairway to Heaven," "Kashmir," Charlie Daniels' "Devil Went Down to Georgia," "Bohemian Rhapsody" ... just great music. And when I'm putting together these programs, the show evolves over the years. I add in new pieces, but I'm always looking for classic rock songs that translate great on the violin and then have just epic guitar solos. So we've got "Free Bird" towards the end of the show, which of course is the

greatest rock guitar solo of all time, and it's so fun to perform and burn through that on the violin. Something that's really unique about my performance is that I also use a loop pedal really heavily throughout the show. It's not just me getting up there and playing one single violin line; I'm adding and creating these big ... sometimes six to eight-layer lines that make this a larger production style performance.

**RRX:** I love the fact that you're taking songs and giving them a whole new life. Some of the songs that you mentioned, I mean, those are classics, but to hear them played on an electric violin. I mean, that's a whole new thing.

**BV:** Thanks. People love the music, and they're familiar with the music, and hearing it on the violin is something completely new. I think a lot of people go into the show saying, I didn't really know what to expect, but I loved it. It was so cool, so interesting, so exciting. I'm a pretty animated performer, I have a pretty cool instrument. It's an Aquila Bridge electric violin. I kind of roam, run around stage, dance a little bit as I perform; it's a lot of fun. I also engage with the audience throughout the show. This will actually be my second time performing at ... oh boy, it's been a long time, 15-20 years ago at The Troy Savings Bank Music Hall. So, it's a return visit many, many years later. I'm excited to come back.

**RRX:** Wow, it's a very historic theater, but with you traveling the world, there are many other places much more historical than America. I'm sure you probably played in some other historic places, too.

**BV:** Oh yeah, a couple of weeks ago, we were in the Esterházy Palace in Eisenstadt, Austria. That's where Joseph Haydn worked in his heyday. It was amazing performing in these beautiful gilded halls. Some of the places throughout Europe were certainly incredible, but here in the States, we got our beautiful venues, and Troy Savings



Bank Music Hall is a gorgeous place.

**RRX:** It sure is. Now, obviously, you've performed alongside some greats and well-knowns over the years. But delving into your bio, I saw Sesame Street on there. Did you do Sesame Street?

**BV:** I did, yeah, maybe, 15 years ago. I did a performance with Elmo.

**RRX:** That's so cool. That means you've really made it, man! That's saying something right there. That must have been quite the experience.

**BV:** It was pretty cool. It was a very unique and memorable experience.

**RRX:** Got any dirt on Elmo?

**BV:** Uh, he's really tall ...

**RRX:** In real life, yeah.

**BV:** When he stood up after he was done, I was like, Holy cow, he's like 6' 3" or 6' 4".

**RRX:** I'm sure that was a unique highlight to your musical career, but you've obviously been doing it for a long time. Anything stand out over the years that you were like ... man, that was really it for me? That made me feel like it was all worthwhile.

**BV:** Well, my career has kind of been in two halves. When I graduated from college back in 2006, I joined a group called the Boston String Quartet. I played with them for about a decade,

we toured mainly nationally, just all around the United States. And then I had kids. I hung up my violin for quite a few years, and about three-and-a-half years ago, I did some soul searching during COVID. I picked the violin back up as a solo violin player and started touring, really just locally. I was living in Colorado at the time. That turned into national. For the last two years, I've been on the road, 9 to 10 months out of the year, touring all over the world. And I think some of the most special occasions I've had are just some of the collaborations that I've been able to have with people around the world, some of these beautiful halls, and just being able to play in these gorgeous places. We were in Bali a couple months ago, and I travel everywhere with my violin. When we see a beautiful place, I just pick up the violin, get my camera, and do a little TikTok video. Performing in some of the temples in Bali was such a neat experience being there. I think it was one of the most special and exotic experiences of my life being in a place like that. Music has allowed us to have the chance to travel as a family; we've been really lucky. We travel almost everywhere with all 6 of us: my wife, me, and our four kids.

*Continued from page 24...*

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# Canna Talk

By MBF & 400 River

In New York, we have a really exciting and complicated cannabis program. New York has had legal cannabis since 2022, and our medical program has existed since 2016. There are a lot of different types of actors in the New York State cannabis industry, so let's spend time exploring how our system is structured. Even though we are four years into this, the market is still constantly making adjustments and evolving to bring great weed to New Yorkers.

## Medical Cannabis

New York has a robust medical cannabis market. Our state allows approved medical cannabis providers to prescribe cannabis for a variety of conditions. There are a lot of different conditions that can benefit from cannabis use and a lot of different ways to treat them, so talking with a professional is the only way to go. From there, a patient gets their prescription with a precise dosage that can be fulfilled at a medical dispensary. Medical dispensaries have staff that can fulfill patients' orders through various products - flower, vapes, edibles, tinctures, capsules, and more. There are also pharmacists on staff at medical dispensaries to assist patients.

There are purchase limits for medical cannabis, just like in the recreational market. Patients can get enough for a 60-day supply. They also have the right to grow their own plants at home. Even though it's medically legal, plants and product cannot be taken out of the state. This is a downside to cannabis still being federally illegal. One of the most interesting things about the medical program is that there is no age limit. As long as someone is prescribed cannabis by a certified medical professional, they can be ten or one hundred. Another difference from the recreational market is the tax structure.

Medical cannabis users pay a significantly lower tax rate on products compared to those bought on the recreational market.

Cultivation, processing, and sale of medical cannabis is done by Registered Organizations (ROs). Each RO is responsible for providing the most safe and effective product for patients. Product is rigorously tested to ensure that patients get exactly the dose and effect needed. Cannabis must be grown indoors to meet medical standards. The ROs are responsible for submitting a lot of information to the state about each product, so there's a lot of behind-the-scenes work to ensure a compliant end product.

## Recreational Cannabis

New York's recreational cannabis market is quickly becoming a key industry in the state, bringing in millions in tax revenue and offering consumers safe cannabis products to purchase. It's a bit of an understatement to say that the state was off to a rocky start in the first years of legalization, but it looks like we are starting to see some progress in a very positive direction. Within the recreational cannabis industry, there are different players I'll explain now.

## Registered Organizations / Registered Organization Non-Dispensing (ROND)

ROs can operate within the recreational sphere, too. If you've shopped for cannabis, you may have shopped in a medical store as a recreational customer. Most dispensaries will have separate lines or areas for medical users versus recreational users. Medical dispensaries must carry a specific amount of product for recreational cannabis users. You will also find cannabis products from ROs and RONDs in most recreational dispensaries.

## Cultivators

Cultivators grow weed - and lots of it. Cultivation licenses were awarded to those who grew hemp in New York state prior to cannabis legalization. During the first few years of NY cannabis, most cultivators were limited to growing outdoors or in greenhouses. When conditional cultivators were able to renew their licenses, they had the opportunity to expand to indoor cultivation as well. Among cultivation licenses, there are various tiers that allow for a smaller or larger canopy. The first type of cultivation license is outdoor. These grows can be as large as 25,000 square feet of canopy area or as small as 2,500 square feet. Outdoor cultivation can produce some sticky, amazing buds, but weather plays a huge role in the success of these grows. Mixed light cultivation is another type of growing style that cultivators can choose. This involves cultivating cannabis in a greenhouse or hoop house and using supplemental lighting. The additional lighting provides an extra push for the cannabis' growth, and being inside allows some protection from the elements. Indoor cultivation is what it sounds like. Cannabis plants are grown inside a structure using lights. Perks to indoor grows include the fact that they aren't dependent on weather or season - growers can keep growing year-round. Set to very specific schedules, lights mimic natural sunlight and darkness to induce flowering. In New York, cultivators can also opt for a combination cultivation license, which may allow outdoor and mixed light cultivation, for example.

## Dispensaries

New York started off their cannabis program with a strong emphasis on social justice, so the first dispensary licenses given out were to justice-involved individuals. Those who were

arrested for cannabis-related crimes were given first priority to participate in the legal cannabis market. If you look at license numbers and see CAURD (Conditional Adult-Use Retail Dispensary), it is a part of the state's initiative to undo some of the harm of past cannabis policy. New, non-justice-involved dispensary licenses that open operate under license numbers with RETL in them.

The first year of New York's cannabis program had dispensaries opening up very slowly. There are so many rules and regulations for opening a dispensary. Stores need to have secure storage, security systems, and a great location away from schools and houses of worship. It can be a complicated and drawn-out process.

## Processors

Processors wear many hats in the cannabis industry. They can "process" cannabis flower products by trimming flower and making that into prerolls. Processors make gummies, tinctures, and chocolates. One of their most important functions is extraction. The extraction of cannabis oil is critical to the industry. Whether they use CO2, ethanol, or other extraction methods, the product obtained is then used to infuse prerolls, gummies, and to fill vapes. Touring a processing facility is akin to touring a laboratory, where there are strict protocols in place to ensure safety and no contamination.

## Microbusiness

Microbusinesses are a really cool feature of the NY cannabis industry. Micros can grow, process, deliver, open a retail dispensary, and sell to other dispensaries. It's as close to a vertically integrated operation on the recreational market as possible. Micros are a huge asset to the NY cannabis market since they can focus on providing smaller batch, high-quality product.

Stay tuned as the industry keeps evolving and getting even better!



Continued from page 45...

**RRX:** And you have a song that became an ESPN commercial too, correct? "Are You Ready?"

**JP:** Yes! So being from Youngstown, we sit right between Cleveland and Pittsburgh, so we're in a little bit of a cross hairs between Steelers and Browns fans. However, I will take whoever is wanting to work with us, especially in the baseball realm. The Pittsburgh Pirates called and said, "well, they have this thing called Friday Night Rocks where they profile a local regional band, and they have only done this a few times", but they tapped us to potentially do a song and they wanted to recreate (and) change the lyrics of a song that I had already put out and I go, "wait, I think I have something in my voice memos that is perfect for this sports anthemic thing that they're trying to go for". And that was "Are You Ready". That became the song that they used and not only did they use it... it just started to grow legs! The Pittsburgh Penguins started to use it for their commercials. The Pittsburgh Steelers, during their training season, used it in their commercial. And then I got the call from ESPN saying, "hey, we love this song. Can we put it in for ACC Network for softball?" And that was just like what I had in my head for this song...and I was like, "this is amazing!"

**RRX:** That is awesome. What a great opportunity. I love that story. So, what are some upcoming dates nearby on this tour?

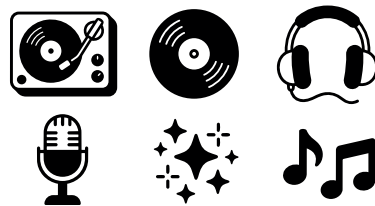
**JP:** A couple of dates that are coming up for New York that would be Buffalo, which is on Thursday, June 11th. The opening act is Jessie Elizabeth from Syracuse. Oh, OK. And then we have Pleasantville Music Fest. We're opening up for OK Go and The Fixx.

**RRX:** Cool. And that's July 11th, I think

**JP:** Yeah. The 11th!

**RRX:** The last question for you is... I've heard your music described in so many different ways. I was just curious. This is something I like to ask musicians. Do you agree with the way people have described your sound? Do you feel like people get it? Do you feel like they're close, or not even close?

**JP:** This is, it's something still that I grapple with, and I can't lie, I have so many different genres that I've always grown up with, so I kind of lean in many directions. I hear a lot of people comparing my vocals to like an Amy Winehouse, I feel like that's too high of a bar that they have set and that's a great compliment. I can go into any supper club venue and be like, OK, I know what kind of set list I wanna do tonight. I can go into a Pat Benatar show and say, "you know what? we're gonna go a little bit more rock forward on our tunes." So it really depends on my mood. But, however, I take it all, I really appreciate all the things that I hear from people vocally. I have always leaned more, into the power pops and just (the) big sounds ever since I was little. I mean, there were huge voices on the radio like Mariah Carey, Whitney Houston, Celine Dion. And then, going into more melodic things. For me it was going into jazz, but maybe Nelly Furtado, Norah Jones, so playing with the inflections of, of the vocals were, were really something that I became interested in. And I do like to punctuate with my drummer - we have to be tight on that stage and everything else will fall into place, I feel. So it depends on the mood, but yeah... I welcome it all! Whatever people want to put us in, I'm OK with that.



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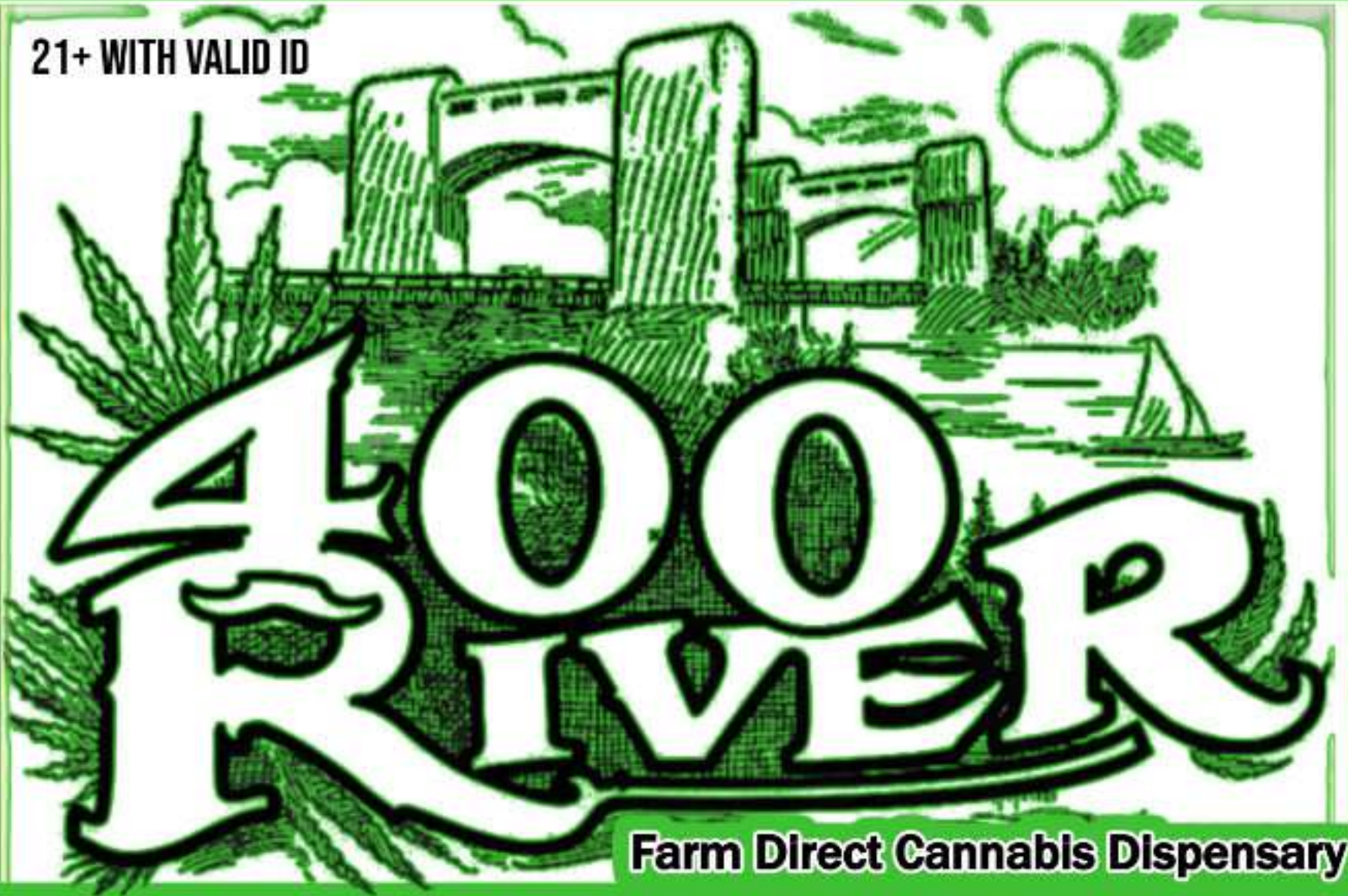
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# Alex Waters :Before Interpretation Takes Hold

By Brad Quan Copeland

Even beneath the blaze of the summer sun, he dwells within the chill of grog, locked within the ruins of rumination, feeling as though a fraught string has been threaded through his temples, looped around his skull, and constricted with the hunger of a feral serpent.

His disdain for humanity's inanity warps the glass through which he views. The sounds of commonality rake his ears with discordance, while the beauty of nature regards him with silent contempt. In the absence of sense, what value does life possess? Meaning can only be found beneath perception and within what we dare not ask.

If everywhere one goes, problems arise, is it wrong to believe that within them is where the answers lie?

Within this existential climate, I found myself revisiting the creative terrain of local artist Alex Waters, whose work makes me feel as though I can move through reality before interpretation fully takes hold. And I feel like that's precisely the unspoken beauty of his work: it operates through the understanding that imagination possesses a freedom reality rarely permits.

The paintings behave almost like psychological thermal scans, exposing emotional temperatures that strain against inherited structures of order and identity. In that sense, the work carries a quiet anarchy, resisting normality while searching for balance between chaos and order.

In one of his paintings, identity appears lodged amid dissolution. Combustions of black, charcoal, violet, and deep crimson merge into the suggestion of a fractured, near-human face. Nearly conjuring itself in full, the image teases the senses before dissolving back into the elusiveness of abstraction, slipping away before perception can fully contain it.

Legibility doesn't interest Alex, whose abstract expressionism exists comfortably within liminality, where spill, gesture, and erosion bleed into one another.

Through further conversation, I was brought into the inner workings of his mental architecture, illuminating what makes his approach to his craft so unique.

Interview with Alex Waters

**RRX:** When you begin a piece without an image in mind, what part of you is making the first decision—the mind, the body, or something quieter that resists naming?

**Alex Waters:** "It's, I would think it's the mind, because a lot of my stuff is more just about the feeling, rather than the physical nature of things. Because I'm not- yeah, I'm not the most skilled painter in the world, and I know I'm not the greatest artist as far as capturing real life- but like

, I try to capture the emotion I'm feeling at that time on the canvas, and that's usually what I try to express.

And like, right now, I'm trying to, like, get into this whole process that happened where I'm, like, I had this weird, crazy medical thing, and I'm trying to deal with that, you know what I mean? So that it's crazy. I'm not dead."

**RRX:** What emotional state do you generally operate from when you create?

**AW:** "I would probably say anxiety. Like, I try to not be anxious in my outward persona, like, have that kind of bartender vibe. But really, I'm an anxious mess. Like, I'm trying to always think around things, yeah? Like you have that feeling in your chest, and it just kind of flutters, and it sucks. It just doesn't f\*\*\*ing turn off. It's like an endless flicker."

**RRX:** What emotional state do you trust the least while creating, and why does that state still insist on entering the work?

**AW:** "The feeling of a deadline. The feeling of, like, I have to get this done sucks. I'm not a fan. I don't work well under it as far as, like, oh, I need to get this done now. It's not as good as the natural process of creating. The natural process of creating is a happy accident. And like, I think the happy accident is much better than like, oh, I have a show I have to do this for. I've been creating on my own schedule, my own time. I have a job. You know

what I mean? Like, I don't depend on this for income."

**RRX:** What do you believe actually happens in the moment a piece becomes finished?

**AW:** "When I look at it, and I'm like, 'Oh, I feel that.' Because when I paint, whatever period of time that may be, that's the pain, that's the story, because that's the emotion that I'm going through right there. And it's hard to get back to that emotion. I think every emotion that you might have about a certain thing is documented on a painting. I try to make that thing there, and that's its world. That little canvas is the emotion's world."

**RRX:** How do you understand control in your process, not as a technique, but as a psychological negotiation between intention and surrender?

**AW:** "So sometimes, as far as the paint itself, I use Golden High Flow, which is an airbrush paint, but I use that flat. Sometimes, like in this painting, this mixed with the black, and I couldn't control that. So that's the surrendering part of what happened, and then it looked great, so then I tried to do that. How I discovered how to paint the way I do is I was drinking a sh\*\* ton of Scotch one night, and I spilled my Scotch on a painting. Alcohol f\*\*\*s with paint something fierce. Then I was like, 'Oh, that's interesting.'

*Continued on Page 21...*



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# The Prog Digest

By Klyde Kadiddlehumper

*"Let's start with the celebratory bits first..."*

So many bits and pieces. So many rants. So many celebrations and so much sadness.

This month, for reasons that, to be honest, are not really essential to the vibe, I bring a little of almost everything.

Let's start with the celebratory bits first – no need to be a downer from the start.

Rush's first four shows, from the Kia Forum in LA, are in the books. And – hot damn – the sets were not simply everything we all know, but material that a great deal of the world doesn't. As memory serves, this was the location of the last full tour-based Rush show before the untimely passing of Neil Peart. For those of you screaming "Get off my lawn" to Anika Nilles filling in, you have all been put in your places, and now look like a bunch of heads-in-the-sand naysayers. So there, I said it.

My good friends Steve and Michelle went. Not like they drove. Not like they went with friends. Oh no. They flew from LaGuardia to LAX, 'cause Michelle is a huge proghead and used to be in the business, and Steve, well, he is always along for the ride. Oh, and they are going to see them at MSG. They only live about 20 blocks from there ... if the weather is nice, they might walk.

Their report is – well – amazing. The setlist is crazy. Opened with "Xanadu" and "Limelight." So many nuggets that you would think it was a gold rush! Opening night: three of the seven parts of "2112." By the last night in LA – all 7 parts. And that is a serious bear to play.

The opening gigs also had a treat. Rush released "Time Stand Still" in 1987 with a female guest vocalist. On these four nights, they played this gem – with Aimee Mann doing her original vocal.

Oh man – Klyde couldn't get tix here on the East Coast, let alone have the stones (did you hear they have a new album coming too?) to pony up the dope dealer monies to catch that gig.

Can't wait for the video concert footage to be available ....

And this brings me to today's rant. I feel like Lewis Black.

First, a statement.

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For that matter, AI "writing" music is stealing money from artists who actually use thought and talent to write their material. If people like what you make with AI, more power to them. But, have the cajónes to be clear the author is not a person.

Lazy SOB's.

Rant over.

Now for the sad news (I heard today): the passing of Dee Palmer at 88. Palmer was significant to the early success and sound of Jethro Tull. In those days, (then known as David) Palmer did the quartet arrangements on "A Christmas Song," orchestral versions for the Tull album "A Classic Case," and major contributions to "Aqualung," "War Child," "Minstrel In The Gallery," and "Too Old to Rock and Roll." Klyde still claims to not be too old to rock and roll – but too young to die.

David transitioned to Dee in 2004, following the passing of his wife, with many psychological and medical consults and surgery. Dee is survived by four children.

Perhaps Rush had it right back in '78 ...

There is unrest in the forest

Trouble with the trees

For the maples want more sunlight

And the oaks ignore their pleas

Until next time. – Klyde

*Continued from page 34...*

**RRX:** No, times are different. I noticed the trajectory of it all. I go to all genre shows in this business because I gotta cover it all. I can appreciate most of it, but I don't get down with smooth jazz. Not the hardcore shows as much, but at many shows, I find myself to be among the younger people in the crowd, and I'm a 48-year-old grandfather. That's not cool.

**JM:** (Laughs) No, it's not! The younger crowds are very particular about what they will listen to. The hardcore scene's always been a very diverse spectrum of styles. But there was never names for all of it, though, you know what I mean? Now you've got beatdown, you got deathcore, and all that. They separate themselves. I don't get that either. I wish everyone supported everyone.

**RRX:** Well, they certainly should. At least you guys are killing it.

**JM:** I appreciate everybody. I appreciate all the love, respect, and support. Look forward to seeing a lot more from us in the future, and don't forget July 25th at the Empire Underground. It's our album release show, and we guarantee not to disappoint!

*Continued from page 23...*

**RRX:** Whenever I see clips or footage of you playing live, I can see how happy you are on stage. It shows.

**AA:** Oh, I appreciate that. It is a great time. It goes by fast. It always goes by fast. I remember for my show last month, I was on stage for almost an hour, and it felt like 20 minutes.



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