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Lindsay & Justin Lee

We're so happy to have time today with filmmakers and creative partners Lindsay and Justin Lee. Thank you both for making space in your schedule to chat with Vents Magazine. Before we jump in, how have the past few weeks been for you?

Thanks so much for having us to chat. It's been a whirlwind few weeks with Go Togo season 2 launching, us moving home — which wasn't part of the 2025 plan — and Lindsay flying off to a film and TV conference in London.

Congratulations on the launch of Season 2 of Go Togo! Lindsay, for anyone discovering the series for the first time, how would you describe Go Togo and what makes it worth tuning into?

Thank you! We're excited for kids, parents and kids-at-heart to jump aboard Go Togo season 2. Go Togo is a warm and gentle low stimulation preschool series following a team of transit vehicles, with adorable voices from

little kid actors, as they pick up and drop off Riders in the city of Transitville. It's fun seeing these important little kid vehicles being given important responsibilities, even if they make mistakes like real kids. We have some funny adult characters as well, including a grumpy old railgrinder voiced by Paul Sun-Hyung Lee.

Justin, one of the most striking things about Go Togo is its handcrafted aesthetic, a refreshing contrast to today's digital-heavy landscape. What was the creative inspiration behind Go Togo, and did you always plan to take this more tactile, handcrafted approach?

Lindsay and I dreamed up Go Togo during a visit to the Halton County Radial Railway museum in Milton, Ontario. They had on display a whole bunch of public transit vehicles spanning different eras, and as we looked at them, we started wondering how they felt and what their personalities were. One cute little bus from the 1940s had this slightly forlorn expression, so we thought maybe an anxious

bus might be a fun character. At the time, we were working on our very first original series, Miikshi, which starred Muppet-style hand puppet characters and included model miniatures for shots of driving cars, flying jets and so forth. So we started thinking about a show where those model vehicles were the main characters, with everything brought to life through practical filmmaking like Miikshi.

Lindsay, from your perspective, why does practical, handcrafted filmmaking continue to resonate so strongly with children, even in a digital-first world?

I think it's like seeing their toys come to life in the most authentic way. When our characters perform, it isn't quite perfect and we lean into that. If Wheeler the bus doesn't quite hit his mark, we allow the RC animator to adjust while the take is still running, and that can make it into the final episode. And the best thing is that it can become part of the character. Wheeler the bus is naturally

anxious, so he'd want to keep adjusting until he's stopped on just the right patch of road. When we shared our first pieces of footage with our broadcaster CBC, the response we got was that it had an almost CG look of perfection, which was a huge compliment. Since we're releasing the series alongside many very beautiful, eye-popping CG kids' series, as practical filmmakers we designed the show to have a contemporary design while leaning into its handcrafted warmth.

Justin, was Go Togo a challenging pitch at the beginning? And what made CBC Kids the right home for the series?

CBC has been home to really well-made, high quality kids' entertainment for decades, and Lindsay and I grew up watching CBC staples like Mr. Dressup and Theodore Tugboat. So we've wanted to work with them for years, and when the 2020 lockdown happened, they launched an artists' relief fund to help creators weather the uncertain times. Part of that was an opportunity to pitch ideas for development, and we pitched Go Togo. Luckily, our series was among the projects chosen, and we spent the next few years working with CBC to develop the series and produced a short proof-of-concept. The CBC Kids executive we've been working with, Drew Mullin, has been a great creative partner, since he comes from directing and producing himself. Together, we're always pushing the better idea, whether that's through a story point or a fun visual design. We're also very grateful for support from the Canada Media Fund, IPF's Cogeco Television Production Fund, Ontario Creates and Shaw Rocket Fund. We couldn't make the show without them.

Lindsay, without giving too much away, what can audiences look forward to in Season 2?

Season 1 explored preschool math concepts like "times of day", "above & below" and "counting backwards". Having the opportunity to broaden these concepts in season 2 to include the more emotional issues kids face like jealousy, FOMO, and dealing with change adds so much fun and dimension to the characters and world. We're carrying forward the colourful visuals and funny little Riders with their funny babbling sounds from season 1, but now we get to know the characters a lot more.

Justin, what sparked the idea for Gazelle Automations, and how did the two of you build it into the imaginative miniature world it's known for today?

Our first big project was Thunderbirds: The Anniversary Episodes. Lindsay and I both puppeteered on that, and she also supervised the puppetry and helped build some of the characters while I co-produced with two other producers and directed an episode. Because it was Thunderbirds, the project attracted a lot of really skilled industry

veterans talent who'd themselves been inspired by the original series. We had artists who'd been senior modelmakers on Star Wars, Lord of the Rings, the Dark Knight trilogy and the Bond films among other things, so Lindsay and I were soaking up all this practical model miniature filmmaking knowledge that we wanted to put into our own projects. Even though my professional background is in digital visual effects and CG, which I also love, there's something magical about creating a movie with real objects, right in front of the camera, with the energy of crew members all huddled around. I really think that comes through in the final result.

Lindsay, what has the experience of creating and running Gazelle Automations been like for you? And where do you see the company heading in the next five or ten years?

It's great, because there are new creative challenges all the time, and one year can be so different from the last. There's a lot of variety in the work we do. In 2023, we filmed a puppet web series for Toronto-based opera company Opera 5, another puppet web series for the Kingston Symphony and three Miikshi spin-offs for a particle physics professor at the University of Tokyo. And then Go Togo was greenlit for production at the end of that year. As for the future, we have several projects at various stages of development, and we'd love to tell more stories about Togo the subway, Stella the streetcar and Wheeler the bus in another season of Go Togo.

The other major project Justin and I have been working on is a feature film called Space Bao which isn't specifically for kids, about an intergalactic food courier making the ultimate delivery to save space suburbia. The main characters are a space otter and a talking refrigerator, of course, and we're bringing it to life with puppets and model miniatures.

Justin, can you introduce our readers to the team behind the scenes — the people who bring Go Togo to life?

I'd love to, because Go Togo is so much more than just me and Lindsay. We're fortunate to have a really talented, dedicated team collaborating with us. And most everyone wears multiple hats!

Jeffrey Mackey, our director of photography and longtime collaborator, is also one of the series' directors and a genuine MacGyver who can build and fix things with his brilliant, near-mad-scientist mind. Bonnie Do, our producer, is the glue that holds everything together, between managing the crew, interfacing with our many partner organizations and staying on top of the incredible amount of administration needed to run a production. Bonnie connected with us through a Toronto Star interview we did about Miikshi, and thank goodness! We could not make the show without her. We have an amazing group of directors this year including Vancouver-based stop-motion animator Kaho Yoshida, Emmy-nominated animation director Colin Lepper, and Benjamin Fieschi-Rose and

Kirsten Brass, who themselves run their own puppet and stop-motion production company and are incredibly talented. Our art director Graeme Black Robinson, who we later discovered is a pretty big fan of Thomas & Friends and brings that love to this show, is also an incredible puppeteer. But he's so busy building Transville in the art department that we can never get him on set to control any of the characters!

And speaking of RC animators, we're lucky to have some heroes of ours bringing the vehicles to life. Marty Stelnick, creator and performer of YTV's Fuzzpaws that I grew up watching, Gord Robertson, who played Zo-boomafoo, Kanja Chen who plays Pogey Fraggie, Ferguson Merggle, and the Grizzard on the new Fraggie Rock series, and Mike Petersen who puppeteered on the original Fraggie Rock and Labyrinth, and that's far from the many amazing credits these guys have. And there are so many other crew members I haven't gotten to. I wish I could give every one of them a spotlight, but we'd be here all day!

A fun one for both of you: What's your favourite movie about filmmaking: Living in Oblivion, Barton Fink, The Player, Swimming with Sharks, or Ed Wood?

Ed Wood for sure. There can be such a theatrical-ness and seat-of-your-pants approach to making films with puppets and model miniatures, and while everyone takes the work seriously, there's a particular type of ridiculousness you don't get when making a live-action drama. You have to be a special type of eccentric to work in this field. We've heard our shows look really polished, which is equal parts wonderful to hear and funny to us, because right under the set there's a crewperson holding it up.





Kerry Frances

We're very excited to have some time today with acclaimed actress, singer/songwriter, voiceover artist, and producer extraordinaire Kerry Frances; greetings and salutations, Kerry, and thanks for carving time from a busy schedule to speak with our ever-inquisitive readers here at Vents Magazine! Before we dive down the celluloid-lined Q&A rabbit hole, how is the latter part of 2025 finding you and yours?

Hi Vents! Thanks for interviewing me; I'm happy to be here. The latter part of 2025 is finding me quite busy, more so than I've ever

been, between the release of two movies, a song, auditions and meetings, plus holiday things. I'm very much looking forward to a bit of a break during the holiday season before jumping right back in. I always like to remind myself that this type of busy is still just a taste of how crazy it will get, and that I'm living in my answered prayers.

Major kudos and accolades on your bravura turn in the eagerly anticipated sequel *Wake Up Dead Man: A Knives Out Mystery*, which premiered in November, prior to its Netflix debut on December 12! Starting at the top, can you explain what this iteration of A

Knives Out Mystery is about and how your character of "Tammy" figures into the proceedings?

Thank you! *Wake Up Dead Man* is the next movie in the *Knives Out* films and follows Benoit Blanc as he heads to a church to solve the murder of a priest there, amidst a small community of churchgoers. Tammy runs the local morgue and helps the mystery and storyline move forward by showing the body to Blanc and the other key players. Tammy is no-nonsense, vaguely annoyed, focused on her work, and enjoys being part of the town on her own terms.

Did you know as soon as the script for *Wake Up Dead Man: A Knives Out Mystery* landed on your professional desktop that you were ready to embark upon another *Knives Out* motion picture? Was it liberating to play an entirely different character in this film versus the original?

I'm always ready to embark on another *Knives Out* movie! I'm really honored that Rian trusts me with his work as he's writing and thinking, and once he's got a draft for me to read. I'm always hopeful there will be a part for me, but I don't ever assume, of course. Once I read it, I hoped even more for that outcome and am so glad it happened. I love the *Knives Out* movies and hope to make many more; I don't think there's anything else like them, and they're so well done. It was fun to play a new character! Sally in *Knives Out* is so different from Tammy in *WUDM*, and it's fun to get to explore both of their worlds and minds.

How is *Wake Up Dead Man: A Knives Out Mystery* similar to the prior two entries in the *Knives Out* franchise? How is it different?

It's similar in that it's centered around Benoit's detective work and a murder, along with an excellent ensemble cast. They also both have exceptional writing and storytelling that pulls you in. It's different in that it's a bit darker and takes on the herculean task of tackling religion and faith in today's world. This one is more focused on the primary role of Father Jud, played by the awesome Josh O'Connor. In the past movies, the ensembles were utilized a bit more. Anyone can watch any of the *Knives Out* movies at any time without having seen the others, but I encourage everyone to see them all.

What was it like collaborating again with director Rian Johnson on a *Knives Out* film? Is Rian what some actors might refer to as "an actor's director"?

This is our third time working together, with *Poker Face* being the other thing we've worked on together, but we've been very close friends for nearly half my life. Rian is one of my all-time favorite people, so getting to work with him is a treat. We speak

the same language and understand each other deeply, so it's a unique experience that I don't take for granted. Oftentimes, you get to set and don't know anyone. I have the joy of getting to set and knowing not only the writer/director at the helm of everything, but the producers, assistants, and even other actors who repeat, like Daniel Craig and Noah Segan. That is an unmatched feeling. Rian listens to my ideas and thoughts and has added a scene for me in both films so far, based on my suggestions. Rian has taught me that the tone of the set comes from the top down, and he sets a happy, giggly, enthusiastic yet calm tone. I do believe he's an actor's director while still maintaining the idea of the production as a whole, what the execs expect, and keeping everything in mind. I'm excited to keep working together, and hopefully the roles will keep growing so we can work even more in depth.

Speaking of collaborations, you work alongside a brilliant ensemble in *Wake Up Dead Man: A Knives Out Mystery*, including the likes of Josh O'Connor, Glenn Close, Mila Kunis, Jeremy Renner, Kerry Washington, Josh Brolin, Thomas Haden Church, and Andrew Scott—not to mention the ever-phenomenal Daniel Craig, who of course returns as the ever-on-the-ball Benoit Blanc! What was it like exercising your own considerable acting chops alongside this merry lot of thespians?

It was an absolute dream to work alongside this stellar cast! The talent is unmatched. Working with Daniel is a treat; he's very generous and kind, and offered me a lot of fun improv to expand my scene. It was his idea to call out my character's name at the top of the scene, too. There's nothing making him be that way since he's obviously exceptionally talented; he just loves to act and wants to create the very best scene possible, along with extending a metaphorical hand to me to pull me in even further. Glenn Close is sensational. I've never seen anything like what I witnessed while watching her work, and she was super fun to chat with. I wish we got a scene together or more time on set, and hope we'll cross paths again on future shoots. To get to act with the incredible list of A-list actors that I've been lucky enough to work alongside is mind-blowing and special, and I never take it for granted. I can't wait to see who gets added to that list next, and hope to be that kind of actor for other actors in the future—where someone may say, "Oh my gosh, I get to work with Kerry Frances, and she's really kind and fun." That's the goal.

Along with being an incredibly gifted actress, you're also a noted and respected singer and songwriter, with a new single by you entitled *You & Me & Everything from the film Us & Ourselves* (which you also had a plum acting part in!) set to light up record charts across the ever-loving globe; congratulations! Can you talk about the song and what inspired you to record it?

Thank you so much—yes! The song is inspired by the music track that the writer/director sent to me, along with the plot of the movie and the feeling of simple, pure love. Think of being on a long drive with your love, enjoying silence and making each other laugh and music. Windows down, coffee in hand, leaning over for a kiss at a stoplight. That's how I hope the song makes people feel. I was thrilled the writer/director of *Us & Ourselves* asked me to make this song with him, and excited it's in the movie, as that was one of my main goals for this year. I'm excited to release more music and place more music into TV/film.

Your work as both an actor and a musician puts you in a category of other distinguished actors such as Juliette Lewis, River Phoenix, Keanu Reeves, Kevin Costner, and Judy Garland—among many others!—who have also plied their creative wares in the world of music! Do you have a preference between acting and music, or is it a case of apples and oranges in that they're both equally satisfying?

Wow, what a list of talents to be included among! Thanks for that—it means so much. They are definitely both the sweetest fruit. I think of myself as a storyteller. Whether that's acting in a movie, on stage, recording a song, writing a script, or many other things, they all come from a creative place within myself. Acting and singing and songwriting do something for my soul that I've never been able to find words for. I love this work very much.

We would be woefully remiss not to talk up another very personal production you are part of, the short film *Mama Mama*, which premiered closing night of the 2025 Oscar-qualifying HollyShorts Film Festival and which you wrote, directed, produced, and starred in! What is *Mama Mama* about, and what inspired you to tackle it not only as an actress but also in the critical roles of director, writer, and producer? And when can cinephiles look forward to checking it out either at the cinema or on the tube?

Mama Mama came to be after I filmed *Poker Face* and lost my sweet dog, Henry Bear, right after wrapping. The women on the set of *Poker Face*, like Lilla and Nora Zuckerman, the showrunners, took me under their wing to teach me and spend time with me, and that opened me up to pursuing my writing goals. When I lost Henry, I started wondering how people would react if I had lost a 12-year-old child, not a dog. Those things snowballed right into *Mama Mama*. I knew I wanted to write and direct it and was lucky to find friends to be on board to help. This short has really changed my life, and I'm itching to get back on set ASAP. It's currently able to be watched via the link in my bios on Instagram and TikTok, and will be uploaded to YouTube shortly. I hope you enjoy it!

Outside of what we've talked about today, can you give readers a hint or three as to what else you have coming up in 2026?

More music, more movies and TV shows, new reps in the form of talent agents and a talent manager (the rest of my team is sensational), and selling some of my scripts and book adaptations that are currently in meetings. The world is my oyster, and I'm running full steam ahead.

Final—SILLY!—question: Favorite movie about the making of movies—*Living in Oblivion*, *The Big Picture*, *Boogie Nights*, *Hollywood Shuffle*, *The Player*, *Swimming with Sharks*, *Barton Fink*, or *Ed Wood*?

What a fun question! I'm going off book and telling you a never-before-heard secret: my love of the E! True Hollywood Story "Making of a Child Star" was my favorite industry documentary. A little different than a movie about making movies, but right up there if you ask me. I'm 100% certain no one has ever heard of it, but I watched it every single day as a child desperate to move to LA and act. In between, I memorized Judy Garland's biography. Old musicals that are about actors or singers or dancers are also favorites, even if they're minor plot points. Thanks again for having me!



Alter Bridge

Host
of the
Month

In advance of their upcoming self-titled album, **VENTS** recently caught up with Myles Kennedy to talk riffs, vocals, protecting your voice on tour, creative balance, and the long road to finding your own artistic identity. From frustration-fueled guitar parts to webcam pug puppies in the studio, Kennedy reflects on the moments that shaped his music and career.

[NOTE: This interview has been edited for purposes of brevity and clarity/]

RIFFS, FRUSTRATION, AND DOWN PICKING

VENTS: So “Disregarded” has my favorite riffs of the album, I think. And “Slave to Master” also has some memorable riffage in addition to being a sort of epic track. So is there a riff or a vocal part on the new album that pushed you technically?

Myles Kennedy: Well, technically... yeah, there’s a funny story. There’s a song called “Power Down,” which was written, long story short, I had a guitar. I was sitting there and Selena, my partner and wife, she came home and she laid some bad news on me

about what the bill was going to be from an HVAC guy. It was coming crazy. And I was just like, you got to be kidding me.

And I remember just out of frustration coming up with that riff. It was just born out of pure frustration with the HVAC industry. But it was kind of a tricky riff to get down because it’s all down picking. And it was at such a tempo that I had to really kind of woodshed for a while before I actually demoed it and presented it to the band.

But that’s the cool thing about the dynamic in this band is sometimes you’ll write a riff knowing... Mark’s great with down picking. He’s really good. And so you’ll know the way

he attacks the string is really going to make this riff come to life. And so, yeah, it’s great to have that.

FINDING YOUR VOICE, LITERALLY AND STYLISTICALLY

VENTS: And what’s a moment in your career where your approach to singing or writing changed in a big way? What was the metamorphosis moment?

Myles Kennedy: I think for me... well, there was one thing that changed a lot, and this is kind of the gory details. For years, I had this problem. I kept getting

these chronic sinus infections, and it was really affecting how I would sing. I’d get real nasally, and it was affecting consistency.

So they went in and they did this thing where they opened it up and made it so I could breathe again. And so anything kind of like pre-2015, I would almost want to go back and re-record. Because I felt like I suddenly had a new instrument. So that was a good thing.

But stylistically, I’ve learned to really embrace my lower register more in the last 10 years. It doesn’t always have to be super high. I feel like the timbre is oftentimes a little

more pleasing to the ear than if it's always high. That took me a while to figure out.

I like to use high stuff just to punctuate things, and it's for drama. But I also feel much better singing lower and leaning more into my Paul Rodgers influence versus the Robert Plant influence.

VENTS: Barry White.

Myles Kennedy: Yeah, Barry White. Exactly.

SONGS THAT CHANGE WITH TIME

VENTS: Or Johnny Cash, too. Right, right. So is there a song in the Alter Bridge catalog that means something different to you now than when you wrote it originally?

Myles Kennedy: I think there are probably a lot along the way. But I'm drawing a complete blank at the moment. But yeah, songs do tend to take on new meaning as time goes on.

You can insert a new set of circumstances that you've lived through that maybe you didn't understand prior. And I think songs like "Miss You When You're Gone" or "Wonderful Life," songs about loss, definitely change. The older you get, you experience loss more and more. And so they just become more meaningful because you have so much experience with that. Being a human.

PROTECTING THE VOICE (OR NOT)

VENTS: And there's a bit of a two-parter. How do you protect your voice on a long tour? And there are legends of some singers deliberately not protecting their voice to keep it raspy.

Myles Kennedy: Rasky?

VENTS: I don't know. I don't know.

Myles Kennedy: It's a new word. You invented a new word.

VENTS: But is it true that there are some singers who don't go out of their way to protect their voice?

Myles Kennedy: I've heard of singers that like that sound. They want to go for more of that. It's like a tube amp. You want to turn it up, work those tubes harder, and get more gain.

For the way that I sing, I tried that. When I started playing with Slash around 2010 or 2011, I incorporated more of the rasp thing at times. But what I found is that it really degraded my ability, especially with pitch.

The raspy thing can be cool at times, but my ear really does not like it if you're not spot on with pitch. So I opted for using a cleaner tone and keeping things from going flat. That's just the way I do it.

There are guys out there with these really cool raspy voices, and they don't worry. They party and do their thing. I look at them and think, man, I'd last a week on the road if I lived that way. I'm kind of envious. They get to have fun. They get to talk.

That's the thing I hate more than anything. Tony Harnell, who sang in TNT, said something to me once that really stuck with me. He said, "the lonely life of a singer on the road." And it's true. You always have to be aware of how much you're using your voice. That's why I don't do a lot of interviews on the road. My voice is a delicate flower.

NEW MUSIC AND GUILTY PLEASURES

VENTS: So what recent musicians or records have sparked new ideas for you?

Myles Kennedy: I don't know if they've sparked ideas creatively, but there are records I've listened to a lot. Wolfgang's new record is great. That's kind of in the same genre.

But I love Sam Fender's latest record. He should be a national

treasure in the UK. What a brilliant songwriter. And the record I probably listened to more than anything this year is the latest Wet Leg record. It's great. Those songs are so catchy and so good. She's such a great singer, the melodies are great. To me, it checks every box. That's good rock and roll.

VENTS: Is there anything you listen to that might surprise people? Any guilty pleasures?

Myles Kennedy: Guilty pleasures? How much time do you have? I definitely have them. Yacht rock, for sure. Give me some Little River Band. But so many people like that now, I don't know if it's even guilty anymore.

As far as different things, Ella Fitzgerald is a big one for me. Other than Steely Dan, I've probably listened to Ella more than anything in the last 15 years. As a singer, that's the North Star. That's what you shoot for. She was incredible.

CREATIVE WALLS AND BALANCE

VENTS: If the band ever hits a creative wall, what helps you break through it?

Myles Kennedy: Oh, it happens. I need to step away and do something not music related. That's hard for me. I'm obsessive. It's like playing fetch with a dog and the ball goes behind the couch. They won't stop until they find it. That's how I am with songs.

But as I've gotten older, I've realized there's more to life than chasing the next part down. It's about balance. Stepping away is important.

VENTS: And how do you balance writing for Alter Bridge, your solo work, Slash's band, and other projects?

Myles Kennedy: When I know I'm going into a project, I start setting ideas aside. Right now I'm in a unique situation. The Alter Bridge record is done. The Slash record is done. Everything's in the can.

So now I'm sitting here going, what do I do? I intentionally am not writing. I'm doing strange things I haven't done in years, like taking college courses, trying to become a more well-rounded person. I'm sure in a few weeks I'll pick up a guitar again and start chipping away at something.

STUDIO SECRETS AND ADVICE FOR YOUNG ARTISTS

VENTS: What's something fans would be surprised to learn about how Alter Bridge works in the studio?

Myles Kennedy: Here's a little useless bit of trivia. On the third record, which was really dark, we needed something to break that up. I had our bass player Brian set up his laptop with a webcam called "Brendy's Pugs."

It was just a live feed of newborn pug puppies running around. During the entire arranging process, that was on the screen. So you'd juxtapose that with songs about losing faith and really dark themes. It helped keep our sanity.

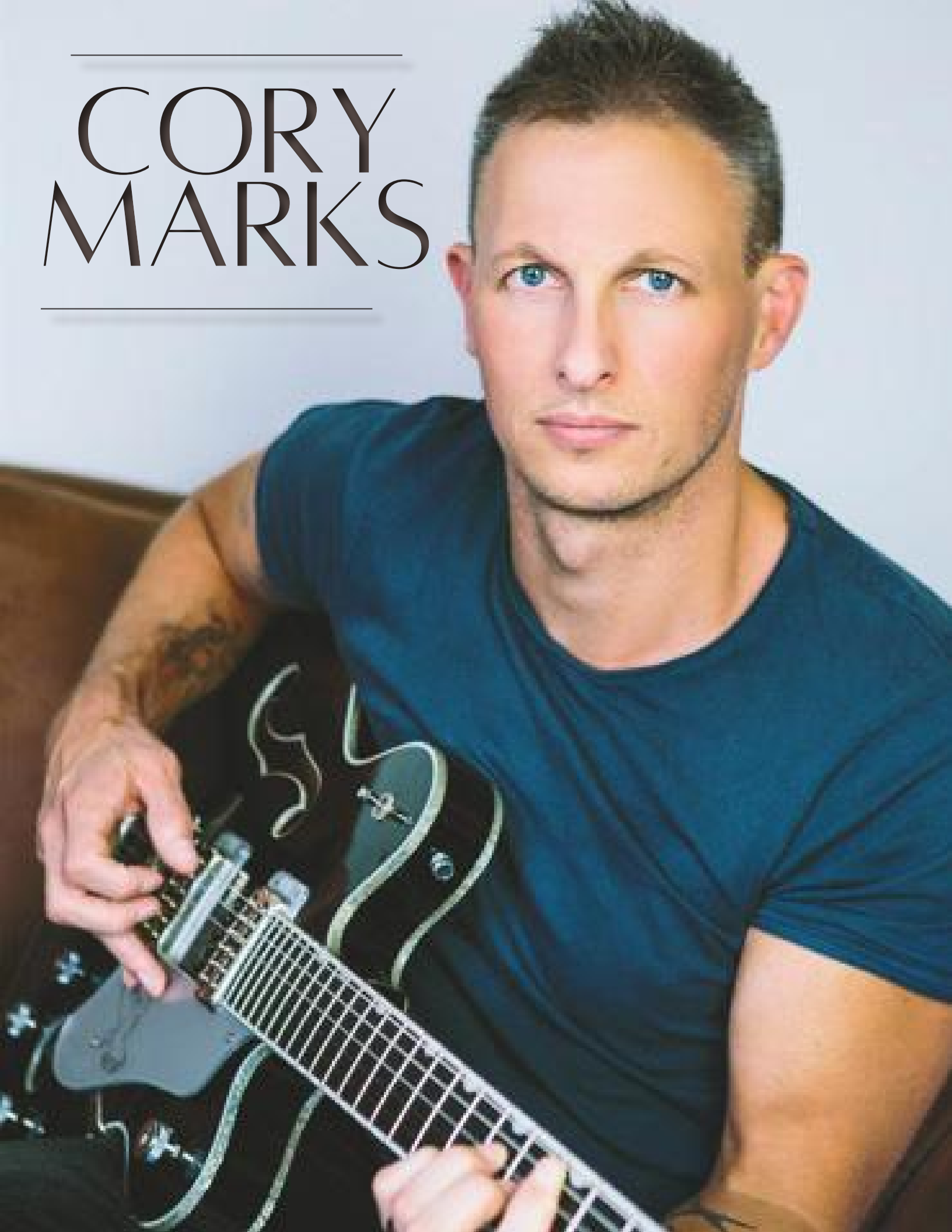
VENTTS: If you could give young musicians one piece of advice about finding their own sound, what would it be?

Myles Kennedy: Find out who you are. It took me years. There was so much mimicry early on. In the Mayfield Four days, I had just heard Grace and seen Jeff Buckley live. It changed my life. It was all Jeff Buckley and Thom Yorke.

But when I listen back to that first record, I hear someone who didn't know who they were yet as an artist. And that's the key question. Who are you? What's your voice in this world?

That can take a long time. So be patient and keep chasing it down. You'll know when you find it. You'll think, "Oh, there I am." And when you do, it's the best.

CORY MARKS



Hey! Welcome to VENTS! How have you been?

I've been great, I get to make music and put it out there, so I've got to be grateful for that.

What can you tell us about the title and meaning behind your new release 'Electric Love'?

I spend a lot of time exploring music – trying to find my way with the sound I make. I had bought a new Telecaster and a Moollon pedal, and I was just loving playing with the sound of a beautiful clean electric guitar. Many of the songs on the record come from a place of love, or desire or loss, which all invoke a feeling of being alive. So the name kind of just jumped into my head and it felt immediately like it was the right name – when you feel in love, you feel electric.

How was the recording and writing process?

The writing process was pretty easy, for whatever reason the ideas were just flowing out of me. I had a good three month period when I would spend every night just noodling on the guitar or playing and exploring for the fun of it, the pure enjoyment of creation and the ideas just kept coming. I ended up with about 14 song ideas recorded on my loop pedal with various pieces of other instrumentation. So I pretty much had the vibe and feel for the record before I booked any studio time.

The recording process was a mixed bag. Clean, beautiful electric guitar is actually really difficult to capture in the recording process well. Things like finger noise, fret changes, lifting fingers off strings, too much attack with the guitar pick, can all wreck a take. So my producer and I started with recording scratch track demos that were in time to a click track so I could get into the studio and lay down the drums.

In one full day in the studio – I got all 11 songs done. It was great because within the first few hours I had most of the songs done in a couple of takes.... Then the tricky songs started to trip me up. I swear, I nearly quit the drums trying to record "The dark side of Melody" I just couldn't get in the flow or get any good takes. The drum solo part in Exploding Stars and in a B-side that hasn't been released yet called Neon Dream took me a few attempts too, but we got it done.

Next was months and months of me doing the layers of guitars and reconstructing the sounds of the songs with Danny being really hard on me – not letting any "mostly there" takes be good enough.

I remember being on about take 16 of the solo on Almost Sexy, I was so frustrated with myself and just could not get a solo that was any good – and then, it was like an energy came into the room, and my brain just shut off, and I started playing and it just came out, it flowed and the vibe was there and it was like I was watching myself play. It felt magic. And when we listen to it back we knew we had it.

Doing all the keys and bass parts was more about making sure all the parts connected up and built up in a way that kept the listeners interest.

I have never worked harder in the studio, but I am really happy with the result.

Where did you find the inspiration for the songs?

I usually find inspiration from feelings I am feeling and I

explore the guitar neck with my fingers and I listen for a vibe or a note or a sound that resonates, then I kind play with patterns and rhythm until I feel the song moving. This is how most of my core ideas start. Then I layer more and more and more until I have built something that kind of moves and takes you on an adventure. When I get to the studio, it is more about reduction, taking notes out, simplifying things, playing things more cleanly so we get a beautiful sounding song.

Will you be hitting the road this year?

No – you will never see me play live unless you get me drunk in my living room. Most of my music doesn't translate to a guy with a guitar and I am not talented enough to play drums, guitar, bass and keys at the same time...

What else is happening next in your world?

I am writing a song for film at the moment, it is a beautiful and haunting acoustic guitar piece – inspired by Dominic Millars solo work. It is more like a Hans Zimmer composition than a song, so I am in the early stages of laying the idea before I head into the studio.



A portrait of a man with a light brown beard and mustache, wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt and a blue baseball cap with a red logo. He is holding a light-colored electric guitar. The background is dark. The name 'Mallie McCown' is written in large, light blue letters across the top of the image, flanked by decorative diamond patterns.

Mallie McCown

We're very excited to have some time today with acclaimed Blues artist and Guitar Influencer Davey Jones; greetings and salutations Davey and thanks for taking time from a very busy schedule to speak with us here at Vents Magazine! Before we dive down the Q&A music-lined rabbit hole, how is the latter-part of 2025 treating you and yours?

Life has been busy but in the best way. Still putting out videos and getting to help people on Youtube and Tiktok reach their own musical success, and I've been honored to be featured on several magazines and podcasts where I'm able to share my style of blues.

Major kudos and accolades on all your recent successes in the ever-shifting world of music. Peering ahead into 2026, can you give our ever-inquisitive reading audience a hint or three as to what they can expect and look forward to from you, music-wise?

I've been putting the finishing touches on a new album that will release after the first of the year. It's a unique style of blues that mixes several influences from swamp and delta blues to modern rock and funk. As always, I try to stay true to my roots and the blues legends that inspired all of us, while also trying to push the boundaries of my sound and blend some genres together.

We're tremendous admirers of your captivating tune Church of Blues! What's the VH1-Behind the Music origin story of this gem of a ditty?

This was a fun song to write, although like many of my songs, it happened more spur of the moment than being planned out. I have a bad habit of making up songs during shows, and that's exactly what happened. At one of my shows, someone suggested the title of this song, and I thought what a great idea. What would a church of blues be like? Started playing a random guitar riff, and the song just wrote itself.

At the top we introduced you as one of the premiere Blues artists on the music scene. For the uninitiated who may be late to the party, how do you personally define the Blues genre of music?

Blues is that unique genre that allows you to say and talk about real life. Every scar, bad decision, heartache and victory and turn it into something that people can feel. It's a style that also allows you to play all ends of the musical spectrum. From up tempo Texas and Chicago style grooves that verge on Rock n Roll, to smooth Delta and Memphis sounds that bleed heartache, the Blues really lets you play anything you want.

In your humble opinion, what differentiates your music from the Distinguished Competition on the current day music landscape?

I just try to be true to myself. I grew up in South Mississippi and Louisiana, playing southern rock at bonfires, swamp blues at crawfish boils and twangy tele tunes at country dances. You can hear all of those influences in my playing, but it's just who I

am. It's less about being different from the other person, and just trying to be true to where I come from. The blues allow me that avenue to mix all of these styles together under one umbrella. It's not better than anyone else, it's just uniquely me.

You've established a solid niche for yourself on TikTok and YouTube where you weigh in with over seventy thousand followers (!) and where music aficionados can also head over to check out your own guitar lessons as well as to receive insights on your music! Can you talk about how social media such as TikTok has changed the game for music artists everywhere? And do you see social media as the 21st Century equivalent of, say, a Buddy Holly or Elvis Presley fan club during the 1950s? Is it a modern manner to keep up with as well as reach fans?

It's probably more powerful than anything that was available in the past. Artists nowadays are more accessible than ever. We're able to virtually sit together and just chit chat. There's no longer some barrier between people that keeps you from interacting or getting to know your favorite artist. Or in my case, I'm able to reach out and help those who are struggling to say play guitar. People want to know the real you, and that's what makes this time so great. Everyone turn the camera on, and let's just get to know each other. Not only does it help grow a fan base, but it allows the artist to know their audience.

Who are some of the folks both in and out of the world of music who have inspired your own indelible pathway, both professionally and personally?

Growing up where I did, there are great musicians and great people everywhere. I never took formal music lessons, so everything I've learned came the hard way, but there are several people who helped me along the way. My mother actually taught me to play piano and guitar when I was young. Don't imagine she thought I would ever try and make a career out of it, but I'm always grateful for all the time she took teaching me. I was raised to work first and play second, but that work ethic has come in handy in all aspects of my life. I'm going to leave way too many people out if I start name all of the people who shaped my playing, but let's just say, whenever I got stuck on something; there were always great local players around to help nudge me in the right direction and keep me grounded in my journey

What does your touring/performing dance card look like in the coming weeks and months?

I'm always excited about the upcoming venues, but this year will be especially exciting. Not only do I have the new album releasing soon, but this next year is beginning to book up regionally, and I'm excited to see some old friends and meet some new faces. We've got shows coming up all across the region here, and lots of

new features, interviews and podcasts, so I'm looking forward to speaking, meeting, and performing for everyone.

As someone who writes much of your own material, can you take us behind the scenes and give us the full skinny on what the creative process looks like for you? Is there rhyme and reason to the creative madness, or is it a bit more freeform than all that?

It's mostly organized chaos. Honestly, most songs, melodies, videos, etc are more spontaneous than they are planned. To me the best songs are the ones that just happen, not something you force into existence. I always wake up with some melody or lyric in my head. The ones that won't go away are the ones I tend to record. I get quite a bit of my inspiration for music from fans and friends. They throw ideas to me, and I take and run with them. I do the same thing with my guitar videos online. People reach out to me struggling with some aspect of music, and I see if I can break it down into manageable bite size pieces for them. So it's nothing special or fancy when it comes to my music. They're inspirations from those around me, and without ya'll, I couldn't do what I do!

Any final thoughts you might like to leave with fans and readers a like regarding your inimitable musical stylings?

Just this: when you hear one of my songs, for better or worse, you're getting straight-up me. I play every guitar, every drum hit, every bass line, every organ swell, and I write every word. No special production, just a guy from the Mississippi-Louisiana line trying to squeeze every ounce of truth out of a beat up Telecaster. If it makes you feel something (happy, sad, ready to dance, ready to cry), then I did my job. Thanks for listening, thanks for watching the lessons, and keep playing; the world needs more noise made by real people.



OREAGANOMICS

Hi Mike/Oreaganomics, welcome to VENTS! How have you been?

Not bad. Everyday I'm hustling. It's a blessing to be able to work though the alternative is a financial pit of woe.

What can you tell us about the title and meaning behind your most recent release 'Locked Out on Valentine's Day'?

David came up with it. I think it's about wanting to be part of a romanticized albeit corporate part of life and not achieving that due to circumstances both within and outside of one's control. I could be wrong but that's my interpretation.

How was the recording and writing process for 'Locked Out on Valentine's Day'?

We'll see how it was based on the results. We processed a lot of life events through this album. The singer on the first and last track left due to mental health stuff. I learned to sing in a way that sounds like Curtis Mayfield as it fit most of the songs.

Where did you find the inspiration for the songs and lyrics?

All but Next Meal is about my life experiences. I do understand where all the tracks are coming from. All this said, we always prefer to sing it and let others interpret what we're saying.

Can you tell us a bit about the live streams that you do?

We go on live streams and get our songs played there. We are open to being booked but that's a cost and time thing few entities can afford and the number is shrinking. Add that more venues are going under and fewer young adults are going out. That's why going on a music review show is probably the way of the future for small or mid-sized acts. The audience is engaged more, there's more opportunities to get heard than non-festival touring, etc.

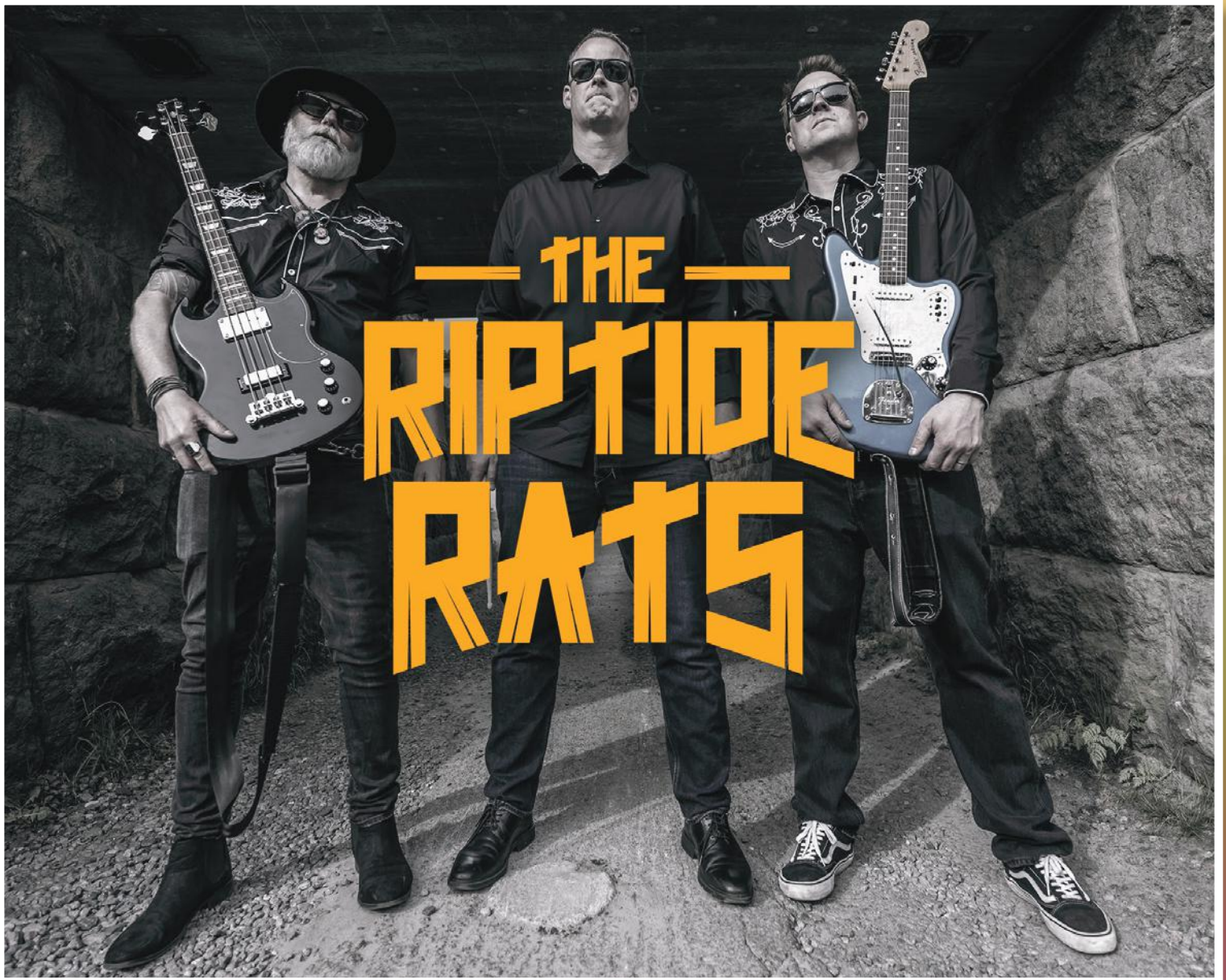
What else is happening next in your world?

Nobody knows what the future holds. See 2020-on. Nobody should predict what the future holds.



Link to the music video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?si=ZNla9RIVPkoSk5ym&v=B_oqiQJac8&feature=youtu.be



Hi guys, welcome to VENTS! How have you been?

Hey! This is Jocke representing The Riptide Rats! All good here, we released our debut album last Saturday with double release shows in our hometown of Kungsbacka, Sweden. We are still jet lagging

What can you tell us about the title and meaning behind your most recent release, 'Waves Of Steel'?

I come from 1980's metal and hard rock, and back then a record could be named something like that and people thought it was a really cool name, so I think of it as something opposite to all the seriousness and stiffness I find in much of today's music. In my world music should be fun and easy!

How was the recording and writing process?

We recorded the whole album in our shed in Kungsbacka with our guitar player Gustav as producer and engineer.

We all write music and contribute to the process, sometimes I bring a melody or a riff, and sometimes I present a full song.

Where did you guys find the inspiration for the songs?

Everywhere. I get most of my inspiration from watching movies and TV-shows. I write most of my music while driving my car. And lately I have been listening a lot to old Motown records, there are so much great stuff to get ideas from there!

Will you be hitting the road this year?

We don't have a tour planed, but we will play shows in Sweden, Finland and Spain during the next six months.

What else is happening next in your world?

We got a couple of nice projects in the works with some other bands, and we have just started writing and rehearsing material for our next album!

Thank you for having us!

THE RATS:

Gustav Wilhelmsson – Guitars
Fredrik Wallgren – Drums
Jocke Olsson – Bass
Erik – Extra Guitar (the honorary 4th Rat)

Official web shop merch/audio:
<https://theriptiderats.bandcamp.com>



facebook.com/theriptiderats



instagram.com/theriptiderats



THE RIPTIDE RATS on Spotify



youtube.com/@RiptideRats



vimeo.com/riptide rats



Hey! welcome to VENTS! How have you been?

We have been great! Illusions of Grandeur continues to do what we do! Tour and make new music!

What can you tell us about the title and meaning behind your most recent release, 'MIDNIGHT25'?

MIDNIGHT25 Illusion of Grandeur's newest single. Midnight came together during the sessions for our last album "The Siren" (2022 Revolution of Spirt Records) and was originally written and inspired by the Netflix series "Wednesday" The latest version MIDNIGHT25 was rerecorded with our new producer Brandon Wolfe here in LA. We felt the song really needed a new life and an updated sound, so we (along

with a ton of requests from our friends and fans "The Siren Nation!") decided to revisit it. We love how it came out!

How was the recording and writing process?

MIDNIGHT25, it's for sure an exception in our discography. It's a song that would not normally exist in the Illusions of Grandeur writing style. So, while in our writing process for our last record "The Siren (2022)". While CM was in our recording studio, just warming up, Maggie was walking through working on some lyrics, just a basic writing process that we have. CM began playing a "riff" Maggie stopped CM dead in his tracks and said, "Play that again", it was just a warmup, not actually in our normal tuning of A, but this time in B. It sparked Maggie to start to write and

arrange and in about an hour have the bed track for the song "Midnight". Updating the sound of MIDNIGHT25 to meet our new production. Illusions of Grandeur has moved into a little more of a modern metal and industrial sound which appears on our new EP "The Siren Rises PT1: The Witch". So, taking Midnight and bringing that song into this new world was a challenge and exciting!

Where did you find the inspiration for the song and lyrics?

Lyricaly, while the idea for the song stems from and was inspired and written for the Netflix's show "Wednesday," there is a deeper meaning behind it. Humans are the true monsters, and while we have seen many portrayals of "monsters" in our culture, people are the truly scarier than the creatures of our stories.

MIDNIGHT25 is darker song opening with the lyrics "The stroke of midnight, all creatures come to life, werewolves and vampires, sirens and ghosts, stuck in time." The song walks you through our version of the "witching hour", touching on the contrast between humans and our "so called" monsters.

Will you be hitting the road this year (Going into 2026)?

Illusions of Grandeur will be hitting the road in 2026 in the United States and UK, join them April 16th at the Whiskey a GoGo & August 2026 for the Siren UK tour, more dates being announced soon.

What else is happening next in your world?

Lots of new music! "The Siren Rises PT2: The Ascension" is coming in early 2026, with blistering new tracks as well as US, European and UK tours! All being announced soon! Check out www.iogmusic.com for details.

The New EP: The Siren Rises Part1: The Witch
<https://distrokid.com/hyperfollow/illusionsofgrandeur/illusions-of-grandeur-the-siren-rises-part-1-the-witch>



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[Illusions of Grandeur](https://www.youtube.com/IllusionsofGrandeur)



illusionsofgrandeur.bandcamp.com/



[@illusionsofgrandeur](https://tiktok.com/@illusionsofgrandeur)

Hey, welcome to VENTS! How have you been?

Thank you for asking. I've been great! Excited beyond imagination for the release of our second album.

What can you tell us about the title and meaning behind your most recent release, 'Solstice II'?

Solstice II is the second part of our double album concept. If you listen to them one after another, the concept becomes clearer. So, the point is that Solstice I starts from the moment of the summer solstice (the longest day of the year). The feeling gets darker song by song, bringing us closer to the darkest day of the year. Solstice II starts where Solstice I left us, from the moment of the winter solstice.

The first album has a song called I, and the second has a song called II. Those songs represent the moments of autumn equinox and spring equinox when the sun shifts from one hemisphere to the other. The themes of the albums are very present for us because we live in Finland. During midsummer, the sun doesn't set at all, whereas in the winter it rarely comes out. For example, between the first nine days of December this year, there was only six minutes of sunshine.

How was the recording and writing process?

Both of the albums have songs that I've written on my own before I had even met the guys. The rest of the songs we've done together, and it's been the most inspirational time of my life.

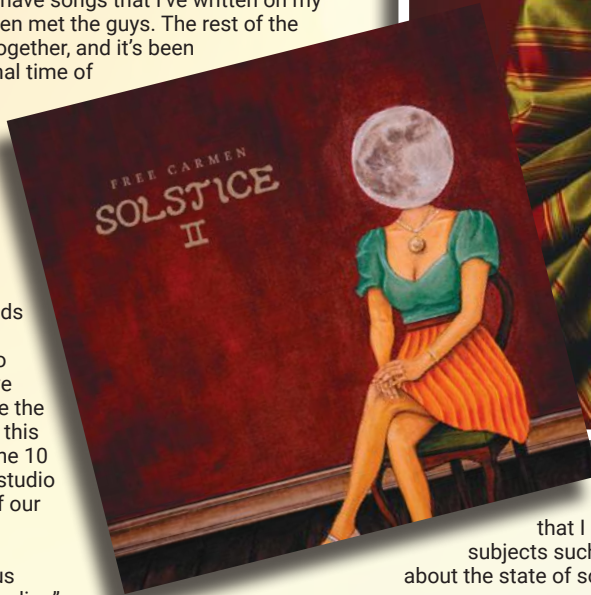
We recorded both of the albums in the same session at E-studio in Sipoo, Finland. That's because we wanted to have the same feel and sounds throughout both of the albums. We also needed to record live as much as possible the only way to achieve this kind of band feel. The 10 days we spent in E-studio were the greatest of our lives.

E-studio is enormous compared to the "studios" people have these days, in the middle of nowhere in complete isolation. The option to stay there for the whole session made it retreat-like. I left my phone home and we agreed that no phones would reveal themselves while recording. It felt liberating and grounding. I think that is why many of the great records before phones etc. feel so relaxed and loose in a good way.

Where did you guys find the inspiration for the songs and lyrics?

Songs for this concept came pretty naturally. As I mentioned earlier, in our home country the amount of light during the day goes from one extreme to another. That's something that affects the whole nation and its behaviour. And as I've been growing older it's been interesting to follow the pattern that goes on year after year. The darkest period from the end of October to the end of February can get really dark at times. Especially if it's a bad winter in terms of snow, like the one we are living in right now.

FREE CARMEN



The lyrics for the albums came from everything surrounding me. Many songs from these two albums are about nature which is something that I could "endlessly" write about. I also like to use it to write about other subjects such as love. Sometimes the line between "is it a love song or a statement about the state of some forest" is very flickering.

Another subject that's much present is war. Two major conflicts began while writing these songs, one of which was the war between Ukraine and our eastern neighbour Russia. That affected me and the whole country a lot. As long as I remember the fear of Russia has kind of been there, but nothing like this. The song Couldn't Reign My Head is from the period when Russia invaded Ukraine and I was in shock that in the 2020s there can still be a war in Europe where men go and shoot each other in the field. And when the war in Gaza started and all of the footage started to flood over me, I simply had to write about it. Keep Your Eyes Closed which is a song from the first album, came to me when I saw a video of a little boy injured and covered in dust after a bomb explosion in Gaza.

Will you be hitting the road this year?

In spring 2026 we already have a good number of shows scheduled, plus a small record store tour. We also have some festivals booked for the summer, which is a big deal for us as they'll be our first ones.

What else is happening next in your world?

We are working on new music that will come out as an EP in the fall of 2026. We're going to the studio in January to record it. And actually, there is so much new music we've written (that we think is absolutely great stuff) so we're heading to the studio after the EP next fall. From that session will be born our next full-length album.