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# THAT FLAMENCO GUY DEMANDS RESPECT - JESSE COOK

16 MAY 2013 BY KEITH SHARP  
FILED UNDER: FEATURED, INTERVIEWS, VIDEO

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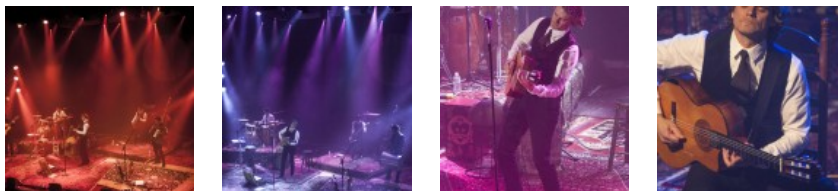


"For 18 years I have undergone the ritual of walking the red carpet at the Juno Awards and endured the same experience," reported guitar impresario [Jesse Cook](#), on the phone from Oregon prior to flying into Toronto to perform at two concerts at the Rudolph Theatre which are being televised as PBS specials.

"As I walk down the carpet, the E Talk Daily crew runs past me in pursuit of the [Swollen Members](#) or whoever is the flavour group/artist of the year. Next year when I take the same walk, that band/artist has gone missing and they are chasing someone else.

"Meanwhile I still have an audience, I still sell records, I still perform concerts all over the world. I figure that one day, E Talk is going to say 'who is that guy we keep running past, maybe we should stop and talk to him?'

One thing [Jesse Cook](#) doesn't have to worry about is being a flavour of the year tag. Ever since his breakthrough at the 1995 Catalina Jazz Festival in California where an impromptu performance which triggered a 10-minute standing ovation before he had even performed a note, Cook capitalized on the ensuing publicity to push his debut "Tempest" album into the Billboard charts at No14.



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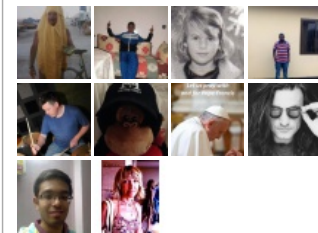
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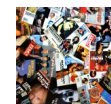


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Born in Paris to photographer John Cook and TV producer Heather Cook, young Jesse constantly moved between Paris, the Arles region of France and Barcelona where he picked up an interest in flamenco music.

Cook proved to be a child protégé, enrolling in the prestigious Eli Kassner Guitar Academy in Toronto after his parents divorced and his mother moved him and brother back to Canada. From there it was on to the Royal Conservatory of Music, York University and Berklee College in Boston.

During visits to his estranged father who had moved to Arles, Cook became acquainted with his father's next door neighbour Nicholas Reyes, who happened to be lead vocalist for the renowned [Gypsy Kings](#) flamenco band.

Since the release of "Tempest", Cook has reeled off six more records and three performances DVD, all of which have registered either gold or platinum sales marks. Cook's latest release, "The Blues Guitar Sessions" released in 2012 is enjoying a similar success story.

Known to the masses as 'that flamenco guy', Cook notes his guitar styling are much more wide ranging, as reflect in his new release. "I love flamenco music; a true flamenco artist is the best guitar player on the planet. The unfortunate thing is because we live in the West, we don't have an appreciation of what flamenco is."

"When I started as a kid, it was as a classical guitarist with some flamenco training," continued Cook. "Then I went to jazz school and learned jazz improvisation and later turned back to flamenco. Now what I do now is none of the above. My musical style is now more of a fusion; I am trying to find out what happens when you mix it all together. Now I appreciate we live in a sound-bite culture so when someone asks me 'what is it that you actually do if you are not a flamenco artist. What are you; Country, Heavy Metal?"

"I realize what I do is not for everybody," Cook explained. "I make music I like to hear. I have an esoteric taste in music. "Some people don't get it and I quite accept that yet some people love it, that's why my music is so subjective."

Yet considering Cook's music receives virtually no radio exposure and his albums aren't exactly a hot selling item at Costco, Cook accepts he has to be creative in marketing his product. This involves constant touring plus a series of PBS concert specials recorded for the North American market.

"Normally, I try to restrict my touring to short segments, but having said that, I have just completed a European tour, a Canadian tour plus about 70 dates in the U.S, it's what you've got to do to sell records these days," explained Cook. "It's no longer possible to browse through a record department to find your favourite albums, those departments don't exist anymore. It's all about the Top Twenty CD's that are being sold at Costco, or Walmart or Target. If you are not in that Top 20, you're not selling CD's at retail."


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Cook is also disturbed that in his opinion, all music on commercial radio follows the same formula. “The hooks are up front, the chorus is up front, they’ve auto-tuned the snot out of the vocals, every beat is corrected by computer – this is how you have to sound to get on radio. But I am saying this as people queue up in droves for McDonalds or Starbucks coffee and other things that are manufactured en masse. Yet at the end of the day I believe people want something with a little more humanity to it.”

“I don’t live in the world where I sell millions of records, I am completely out of that box,” he continues. “If people buy my records, it’s because they’ve seen my shows or it’s a word of mouth thing.”

Another problem for Cook is that he doesn’t release singles that can be downloaded on to MP3 players. His recording world is albums, a form of process that is becoming increasingly obsolete. “I grew up in the world of albums. I love to play an album from track one, listen to the whole thing, I immerse myself in it. Yet the majority of people who listen to music don’t list to complete albums. They download from one track to another but they lose the sequencing of an album. Imagine downloading track seven from Sgt Pepper and then track three from Abbey Road or re-sequencing [Pink Floyd’s](#) Dark Side Of The Moon. You lose the entire sequencing of the record. Correct sequencing has always played an important part of me producing a record. My records are created to be heard in sequence.

One method Cook has utilized to promote his records is television exposure of his concerts via a series of PBS specials. “PBS is a fantastic outlet for people like me to get my music heard. They will play entire concerts,” noted Cook. “I had played at the Montreal Jazz Festival and the organizers gave me a DVD copy of my performance. Problem is they always shoot these concerts the same way. The cameras are locked in position, there’s no dark spots on stage, it’s all illuminated for the camera, the audio and video are mixed simultaneously as the concert progresses. They virtually hand you a copy of the show as you walk off the stage – but they are all so generic looking.

**“WE’RE MUSICIANS, WE HAVE TO TOUR TO PAY MY BILLS, THAT IS WHAT WE DO. I REALLY DON’T HAVE MANY OTHER OPTIONS. I’D MAKE A LOUSY DENTIST.”**

Even in this state, Cook found he could get some mileage from the DVD’s but he wanted a better performance so he decided to shoot his own performance. Cook couldn’t secure any financial investment so he rented out the Rose Theatre in Brampton Ontario in 2012 and shot his own show. “I had no budget whatsoever so I called in a group of young movie students to produce the show, passed on a mobile and instead stuck a hard drive on the mixer. I had friends show up with their cameras and shot the show – the

result was that it looked and felt like a movie.

Cook took the resulting production to the PBS convention in Denver, working the halls, handing out flash drives of the show’s highlights. “PBS stations are all autonomously programmed – it’s not like one person makes a decision for the whole network – but we got four or five stations playing the concert. Then it was 20 to 25 and after five months we had over 50 stations airing the show, some of them repeatedly.

Encouraged by the results, Cook decided to shoot another show to promote his Blues Guitar Sessions release resulting in two dates at Toronto’s Randolph Theatre in April. “Bit more of a budget but I am essentially using the same people and the same production techniques,” explains Cook. “This time we have firm commitments in place from a number of PBS stations including key stations in Chicago and Boston. They don’t pay for the programming but the exposure they provide is invaluable.”

Cook may continue to get a cold shoulder from the E-Talk Daily crew but his popularity is international and his product sales are consistently solid. His music is utilized by such sources as Russian figure skater Irina Slutskaya who won a bronze medal at the 2006 Winter Olympics in Beijing dancing to ‘Mario Takes A Walk’. He has also opened for the likes of [B.B King](#), [Ray Charles](#) and [Diana Krall](#), appeared on records by several artists including a 13-year old [Charlotte Church](#), [Holly Cole](#) and [Liona Boyd](#).

Cook meanwhile is committed to more concert activities as his criss-crosses the globe promoting his new recording. “We’re musicians, we have to tour to pay my bills, that is what we do,” concludes Cook. “I really don’t have many other options. I’d make a lousy dentist.”

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### WRITTEN BY KEITH SHARP

Former Calgary Herald sportswriter, Editor in Chief of the original Music Express Magazine and follow-up ACCESS magazine, is preparing to publish a book on the Music Express years - Music Express Rise And Fall Of A Canadian Music Icon

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