

CROOKED EYE TOMMY,

Interview by Blues Woman Lori Graboyes



by Lori Graboyes

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Crooked Eye Tommy, relatively new to the blues music scene, this being their debut album, called *Butterflies and Snakes* and folks I'm here to tell you, if you don't go out and buy this CD right away you are depriving yourself of what will be touted as one of the best debut CD's of 2015. Crooked Eye Tommy's publicist, Doug Deutsch sent me this CD because he knows how excited I get over new music that jumps right out and grabs your attention and this one did not disappoint. No doubt, Doug knows a winner when he hears it. The band consists of Tommy Marsh on guitar and vocals, his brother Paddy Marsh also on guitar and vocals, Glade Rasmussen on bass, Tony Cicero on drums and Jimmy Calire on saxophone/piano/Hammond B3. There are also guest appearances in Bill Billhou on Hammond B3 on tracks 5 and 7, Becca Fuchs and Dan Grimm on backup vocals and the steel slide guitar stylings of Jesse Siebenberg on track 11.

I sat down with Tommy Marsh to talk about his past, his present and what he now thinks about what the future might hold for Crooked Eye Tommy. He's as delightful to talk to as his music is to your ears. The first track takes care of any suspicions about the name of this band as such is titled as such, *Crooked Eye Tommy*. He uses this song as an example of how cruel people can be even without thinking. All the original songs written are relevant about subjects dealing from the duality of men and women, politics, relationships and how we make our way along our journey in this world.

His Mom was an extremely talented concert pianist who gave it all up to marry his Dad and raise kids. Common place in his house when he was a young was all the kids sitting around while his Mom would sing and play piano. Lots of records were played in the household including Ray Charles, Herb Albert and tons movie musical sound tracks, Tommy says their mother Carla Mae was the biggest source of love anyone could have in their life. His Father's side of the family are all Irish so he heard a lot of Irish drinking music often accompanied by the drinking of Bushmills! As teenagers both he and his brother Paddy were into southern rock like The Allman brothers, Lynryd Skynrd, The Outlaws and Marshal Tucker. That was until their older brother "Buzz" came home with a Muddy Waters record and that was the beginning of their lifelong love of the blues!

I asked him how huge his brother was in the making of this CD? and he explained that they have been playing off and on all of their lives. Paddy was more of a free spirit and emotional and a powerful player, while Tommy is a little more reserved, more the business guy. The music has always been about them playing together. There was a hiatus when Tommy moved to Ventura and they weren't playing together. Tommy put together his own band called Tommy Marsh and Bad Dog. When Paddy rolled into the Ventura County scene with his magical song writing and guitar playing, the birth of Crooked Eye Tommy and the new album Butterflies and Snakes began. Paddy was skeptical that this CD would not turn out well but Tommy (always the driver) had confidence. The Studio experience boosted Paddy's confidence level and it is now 100% as well it should be.

Talking about the songwriting process between Tommy and his brother Paddy he said they write separately and get the basic outline of song then when they start playing it they arrange it together. You can tell Paddy's tunes apart from Tommy's. He thinks his brothers 3 songs are his favorites on the CD.

Late August of 2013, Tommy hit Paddy up to compete locally for a chance to go to the IBC's. Jimmy Calire was a fixture in Ojai so they reached out to him as well as Tony Cicero, a local rock drummer (well know for playing in a large swing band) who they hired just to do the show for the competition. They had only three rehearsals, went and competed in a field of seven bands for the Santa Barbara Blues Society and emerged triumphant. They went on to reach the Semi Finals in Memphis and this solidified the band.

Tommy hosts The Session a weekly Ventura County Blues Society sponsored jam featuring some of the biggest blues artists on the SoCal Music Scene. They jammed with Coco Montoya several times, BB Chung King three weeks before he passed, Laurie Morvan, Shawn Jones, Shari Puerto and Kelly Zirbes from Kelly's Lot have all been guests at this highly successful weekly show.

Tommy and Paddy grew up in the shadow of the Sierra Nevada Mountain range but something happened there in The Big Valley, a chain of events that made Tommy and then Paddy permanent residents in Ventura County. Tommy was playing in a Three Rivers CA club, a little bar and grill called The Riverview, and she came there to have dinner with friends. The minute she walked in the room he was wowed, they didn't even speak, but there was lots of energy going on, scoping each other out. She just gave him her email address and Tammy and Tommy have been together ever since. Tommy moved to Ventura County in late 2009 and immediately began playing locally. Paddy followed Tommy to Ventura County in 2013.

Tommy does all the bands booking and while there is nothing in sight at the moment as far as a national tour goes, they never imagined the success and response that this CD has received. Tommy is working on a trip to Europe either the end of next summer of the following spring and in the meantime he and brother Paddy are taking it by the seat of their pants and gigging around California.

Of course we had to talk about the cover artwork of this CD. I asked Tommy if he was on acid when he designed this 70's like psychedelic cover. He laughed hysterically explaining that no drugs were involved but it was the brain child and himself and Mike Lemos. He gave Mike the name of the CD and a rough draft copy of it and told him he wanted him to portray the duality of a woman on the front of the cover. You can see for yourself when you buy yourself a copy of Butterflies and Snakes.

Now we come to the part where the artist shares something with the readers that has never been printed about him before. When he was in high school he was elected student body president in 1980 for class of '81. The Veterans Day Parade was the biggest thing in Porterville. He decided to put a float in the parade and was responsible for decorating it. They held a float decorating party the night before which turned into a 9 keg party at his Dad's barn on the outskirts of town. They finally got around to the decorating the float the next morning. Hungover and laughing they decorated the boom truck in Animal House style. One of the signs read "Sin, Sex, Booze Fun we're the Class of 81". In the aftermath Tommy got "impeached" from his office and suspended from school. Local Pastors began preaching about the moral decay of the city and wages of sin in it's young leaders.

Tommy continues to work 4 days a week as a mechanic but has had the good fortune of being in a good spot financially if something really good happens. I got news for you Tommy.....something really good is going to happen.

You can grab yourself a copy of Butterflies and Snakes at CD BABY and most other outlets. iTunes, Amazon and other online retailers.

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