



Rocky Mountain High — Detroit’s Jeremy Porter Longs for a Snowy Holiday Out West on “Colorado Christmas” Single



Detroit’s Jeremy Porter offers a fresh take on Nitty Gritty Dirt Band’s “Colorado Christmas.” Photo – Noreen Porter
Two years ago, [Jeremy Porter](#) discovered a hidden Christmas classic in a collection of 7-inch vinyl singles. The Detroit singer-songwriter and guitarist flipped over a “[Mr. Bojangles](#)” single for the Nitty Gritty Dirty Band and found “[Colorado Christmas](#)” on the B-side.

“Their version is solid, of course, but it was the B-side, ‘[Colorado Christmas](#),’ that really caught my ear,” said Porter, who also fronts [The Tucos](#). “I’m always looking for a good Christmas song to cover. I actually spent a Christmas in Colorado as a kid, so it just seemed like a natural choice.”

Porter decided to record a rendition of Nitty Gritty Dirt Band’s “[Colorado Christmas](#)” during the studio sessions for his latest alt-country album, [Dynamite Alley](#), via [GTG Records](#).

On “[Colorado Christmas](#),” the protagonist longs to escape Los Angeles for a snow-filled Christmas in Colorado. Surrounded by somber banjo and pedal steel, Porter sings, “Now the sun is setting in the California sky / And I can’t find the spirit anywhere / So I think it’s time for me to tell Los Angeles goodbye / I’m going back home to look for Christmas there.”

“The lyrics exploring the contradiction between winter in the Colorado Rockies and Los Angeles traffic and palm trees was the icing on the cake,” Porter said.

To bring his version of “[Colorado Christmas](#)” to life, Porter teamed up with drummer David Below, bassist Jake Riley, mandolinist-vocalist Tommy McCord, vocalist Danielle Gyger, pedal steel guitarist Adam Aymor, banjoist Nick Raeon, and engineer Gabriel Doman.

“As with all of the songs on [Dynamite Alley](#), it’s the surrounding cast way more than me that makes this great,” said Porter, who recorded the track at The Pharmhouse in Dearborn, Michigan, and The Basement in Plymouth, Michigan.

“David and I worked out the arrangement on the spot in the studio. Tommy and Dani sing wonderfully together and Adam’s pedal steel really ties this whole thing together.”

Many of Porter’s same collaborators also appear on [Dynamite Alley](#). Released in September, the album features 10 tales of heartbreak, loss, and change alongside timeless country and roots-rock instrumentation. To learn more, I recently spoke to Porter about [Dynamite Alley](#) and the inspiration behind it.

Q: [Dynamite Alley](#) explores the impact of change over time and the harsh reality that comes with those experiences. How did those experiences help shape the 10 tracks on the album?

A: I think the best art comes from pain. For me, art doesn’t come from a happy place. I’m not going to sing about how it’s a beautiful, sunny day and that I love my wife and life is grand. All those things are true, but that to me doesn’t make great art. It’s about finding a way to express pain, regret, sorrow, and fear—emotions like that. That’s always been the case with me. I’m not perpetually miserable; I have it good in most ways and everything, but that isn’t my muse.

Q: You named the album after a [CHiPs](#) episode from 1980. How did that episode inspire the album’s title?

A: I was out in Wyoming, and I told that story every night of how I named the record after an episode of *CHiPs*. I was playing in Laramie, Wyoming, and a guy said, “The guy who played Jon Baker [grew up] one city away from Laramie. And I said, “It’s fate that I’m here.”

Naming an album is the second most difficult thing after naming your band. I started the record a year ago in March, so it took a year and a half to come out. I was doing it casually and some things happened and I got sidetracked. The Tucos were also working on a record. But then all of a sudden, earlier this year, we decided The Tucos weren’t going to tour.

I thought, “Well, I want to go out in the fall and I can’t be sitting still. I better get this record done.” I needed an album name and I’ve always been attracted to the names of ‘70s and ‘80s TV shows as potential album titles. I was looking at *The Six Million Dollar Man*, which has some great episode names. I was watching *CHiPs* and thought I should look at some of these *CHiPs* episode names. And then I saw “Dynamite Alley” come up.

Q: [Dynamite Alley](#) is also a nod to Rod Stewart’s 1970 album [Gasoline Alley](#), which includes a mix of originals and covers. How did that album influence the title of your record as well?

A: Part of what I was going after—at least in some moments on the record—was an early Rod Stewart-Faces vibe and he has a record called *Gasoline Alley* that I love. I liked the *CHiPs* connection and I liked the Rod Stewart reference. There are moments on the record where I was distinctly going for that. And I had no time, so everything fell in [line] and I said, “That’s it.”

I like the “Maggie May” / “She Wears It Well” open hi-hat kind of strumming stuff that’s similar to a song like “[I Didn’t Want to Break Your Heart](#).” That’s an attempt to emulate that feel, which I’ve done on some of my other solo stuff. But I never really felt like I nailed it before and then [the album] brings in the mandolin and the fiddle. And when I was working with [my collaborators], I’d say, “Listen to this Rod Stewart song, listen to the fiddle. This is the feel that I want.”

Q: “[Big Spender](#)” highlights the struggle with questioning your worth and losing out to someone who’s richer and more powerful. How does this track serve as an anthem for knowing your self-worth and being true to yourself?

A: It’s a story that’s been told, and it’s a 50-year-old’s perspective on a John Hughes movie. And then halfway through ... he’s saying, “I gotta sober up and get my shit together. What am I gonna do? Wallow in this misery forever?”

Q: “[Big Spender](#)” also includes a reference to Christopher Cross’ 1981 song, “[Arthur’s Theme \(Best That You Can Do\)](#),” and features the lyric, “When you get caught between the moon and New York City.” What inspired that reference in your song?

A: I’m not above doing that and I do that from time to time. I’ll steal a line from a songwriter, but it ties into the lyric, “He’s got an Upper East Side apartment too.” That’s why I went back to “the moon and New York City” [line].

Q: “[I Didn’t Want to Break Your Heart](#)” examines leaving a relationship behind and getting a fresh start. How did this breakup tale come together for you?

A: It flip-flops the protagonist role to now he’s leaving her and she’s not leaving him. It’s saying, “I gotta go, and let’s be honest, you can do better anyway. This sucks, but it is what it is, so let’s have the talk and I’ll be on my way.” But I was going for the Rod Stewart thing on that. It’s a simple song and you never know if it’s going to translate as something that’s going to resonate with people or if it’s a generic-comment type thing that’s been done 100 times. That mandolin lick at the beginning helps a lot and the fiddle helps a lot. Doug [McKean] and Liz [Fornal] doing the backup vocals helped make it too.

Q: “[Destinations](#)” explores settling for a relationship and being in denial about its future. How does this track represent a fitting portrayal of a complicated relationship?

A: It’s about people who are breaking up, but they’re still sleeping together. I know several relationships that have gone through that and I’ll hear, “Oh, I spent the weekend at my ex-wife’s house.” And I’m thinking, “Why did you get divorced?” The song is saying, “We’re trying to break up, but we don’t really know how to do it.” That’s the oldest song on the record. The Tucos took a stab at that in our first year or two, but we could never get the feel right. For whatever reason, it’s been shelved for a decade, but I always knew there was something there. During COVID, I rented a house in western Wisconsin on the Mississippi River and I went out there for a week on a songwriting retreat by myself. The whole world was shut down, so I couldn’t go to the bar and hang out with friends. I stayed in that house and I went with a notebook of half-written songs. That was one of the ones that I finished out there and brought it back.

Q: As a Spanish murder ballad, “[Angelito Bebe](#)” tells the tale of a husband who discovers his wife is having an affair and then kills her and her lover. What inspired you to write a murder ballad for [Dynamite Alley](#)?

A: A lot of people are calling that song out as a favorite. It’s uncharacteristic for me, but I think that’s what makes it cool. I love the minor key and I wanted something up-tempo and something that rocked a little bit. And I wanted something that was dark and it felt Spanish.

Again, [it’s] a theme of a relationship in the process of going bad, and I’ve got a friend, José, who is Mexican and lives in Texas. He helped me make sure I had the Spanish right. And Noreen [Porter] played castanets on that and my friend Harry [Brish] out in Tempe, Arizona, he played accordion on it. I was happy with the way that one came out.

Q: “[The Ballad of Denise and Jane](#)” chronicles two unlikely women who cross paths and fall for the same man. How did hanging out in local bars inspire this track for you?

A: Years ago when I moved to Plymouth, I would meet my friends down there and we would stay out and close the bars. At the time, there was quite a divorcée scene. You’d start to see some of the same few women around week after week.

That’s loosely how it came together and there’s a line in there that says, “They’ll be throwing down tonight at O’Callaghan’s.” That is a bar in downtown Plymouth—Sean O’Callaghan’s. It’s the most honky-tonk song on the record. And Jay Gonzales from Drive-By Truckers, his piano on that is fantastic. It’s one of those story songs with a beginning, middle, and end. It’s [also] a bit of a character study along with the story.

Q: You include two covers on [Dynamite Alley](#): Loretta Lynn’s “[Everybody Wants to Go to Heaven](#)” and The Scorpions’ “[Blackout](#).” What prompted you to record renditions of those two tracks for the album?

A: The Loretta Lynn song is a song that I brought to [[The Wild Honey Collective’s](#)] Tommy [McCord] and Danielle [Gyger] when I toured with them. We did that song every night on that tour and The Tucos tried to do it. The Tucos have a live EP that was recorded at Plymouth Coffee Bean. We did it that night, but it didn’t make the cut. It’s always been in the back of my mind, especially the Ralph Stanley version.

After doing it with Tommy and The Wild Honey Collective and knowing they were going to have a significant role on the record, we decided to do it. We did it with the lineup that we toured with ... which was Nick Richard on bass from The Plurals and Tommy and Danielle are both on it.

And The Scorpions’ song, it turned out as a one-off. I was doing some acoustic shows and I started doing it. I had some shows ... with a friend from Kentucky named Nate Presley. He’s this rockabilly punk guy who has family lineage to Elvis. I wanted to learn it for some shows I was doing with him. And I did and people started to latch onto it.

When I would play it, there were always a couple of people who would say, “Whoa, what is going on here?” I did it a couple of times around Detroit and thought, “Well, I need material and people seem to dig that.” So then I thought, “Why not?” I had my friend Rachel [Goldsmith] play cello on it. She’s from Boston and she did a fantastic job. It was something different and a dark, sparse way to close the record.

Q: Tell me about your creative process for [Dynamite Alley](#). When did you start compiling tracks for the album?

A: I’ve had a solo record in me dating back to the mid to late 2010s. When I write songs for a Tucos’ record, I’ll write 30 songs and at least a third of them don’t make the cut.

I’ll show the band anywhere from 14 to 18 songs ... and we’re brutally honest with each other. Some of the stuff they’re just not into. And some of it, I know they have legs, even if they don’t have legs for that project. I started accumulating some of this stuff—“[Wet Cement](#)” and “[Destinations](#)” were there. This is stuff that either I didn’t bother to show the band or they passed on it, like “[The Ballad of Denise and Jane](#).”

And then I went to that songwriting retreat [in Wisconsin], and when the pandemic hit, I thought, “I’m going to do my solo record.” But I never did because we mixed [The Tucos’] [Candy Coated Cannonball](#) and then I toured with The Wild Honey Collective. And then we came out of the pandemic and The Tucos were back at it hardcore. The Tucos were getting ready to start another record, and I thought, “I got these songs. I gotta start getting the solo record ready.”

Q: You recorded [Dynamite Alley](#) from March 2023 to June 2024 at The Pharmhouse in Dearborn and The Basement in Plymouth. How did the album come together with different collaborators during that time?

A: I did extensive pre-production on it by myself. I demoed everything, and I started figuring out who I wanted to play on it. And the first guy was Dave [Below], the drummer ... His sweet spot is that sort of Americana thing. After I had everything demoed and I had a list of songs, he came over ... and [we] went down into the studio [aka The Pharmhouse]. We went song by song and talked about an approach for two hours—and that was it. He had heard the songs and the demos and then we had that meeting. The next time we got together was when the tape was rolling. We did it in two days. Day one was with electric bass with Fritz Von Kosky and we did the songs he played on—“[The Ballad of Dense and Jane](#),” “[I Didn’t Want to Break Your Heart](#),” “[Destinations](#),” and “[Big Spender](#).” The next day, we had Jake Riley—who’s The Tucos’ bass player—come out and he played upright bass. He did “[Lucy](#),” “[Angelito Bebe](#),” and “[Wet Cement](#).” And Nick Richard played [bass] on “[Everybody Wants to Go to Heaven](#).” We did the drums and the bass in one weekend. I worked on the guitar and the vocals. And then I started bringing Tommy [McCord] and Adam [Aymor] in and everybody else who played on it—Nick, Doug [McKean], and all those guys.

Earlier this year, when we said The Tucos weren't going to be touring, then I had to step it up. I met Jay Gonzales from Drive-By Truckers and he agreed to play [piano] on it. And I got Liz [Fornal] involved from The Orbitsuns. Everything came together quickly in the springtime, but leading up to that, everything was pretty slow.

Q: Some tracks were recorded remotely in Cleveland; Boston; Tempe, Arizona; Athens, Georgia; and Lansing, Michigan for *Dynamite Alley*. How did those parts come together as well?

A: We did the drums and bass at Gabe [Doman's]. And then we did everything else at my house—except for the remote stuff. [Cellist] Rachel [Goldsmith] is in Boston and she went to a studio out there. [Accordionist] Harry [Brish] is in Tempe.

Nowadays, there's a lot of passing tracks around ... and all that. And believe me, I love the convenience of that—it's amazing. And I'm as anti-social as they come ... I would much rather do it by myself. But when it comes to making a record, I'm a huge fan of being in the same room and bouncing ideas [off each other]. I think it's everything, and I think that's lost when you're emailing tracks back and forth, as convenient and awesome as that is—and sometimes necessary.

Q: What plans do you have for new material—both with The Tucos and solo?

A: The Tucos have a record that we started in February; it's about 80 percent recorded. We have about 15 to 16 songs and we did it at Black Sheep Audio in Novi. It's our heaviest record and our most rock 'n' roll record that we've done. The focus is quickly shifting to finishing that. Right now, Gabriel [Doman] is doing rough mixes of everything we have ... so that we can go through everything and get a final list together of everything that we need to do.

The plan is to get that done as quickly as possible, mix it and master it, and put it out early to mid-next year. It's not clear how much touring will be in The Tucos' future moving forward. I miss not being on the road with those guys, and we'll have this album to support, but our ability to get the machine out there might be limited. If that turns out to be the case, I'll most likely be doing more solo acoustic shows to keep busy.

But in the meantime, as we're figuring that out, I'll still be supporting *Dynamite Alley* and I hope to do some more acoustic stuff over the winter. Tommy [McCord] and I have been talking about collaborating on recording and playing shows, so something along those lines will probably come to fruition. In the back of my mind, I've got another solo record with the same drummer and approach with a new batch of songs somewhere. Realistically, that won't be happening until 2026 at the earliest.