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INTERVIEW

THE NEW ZEITGEIST



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BY [CHICAGO 'N BEYOND \(/USERS/CHICAGO-N-BEYOND\)](/users/chicago-n-beyond)

APRIL 5, 2018

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Jen & Eddy of THE NEW ZEITGEIST manage to meld diverse influences that provide consistently ethereal Americana from one tune to the next, pretty dreamy stuff.

— — — Duo musical couples seem to be rarer and rarer these days, was the potential to work together on music part of what brought you two together?

Eddy: The first night we met was at a singer/songwriter open mic in Wrigleyville. Jen was expecting to meet a friend. That friend never showed and I eventually offered her my guitar so that she could perform after she noticed me performing and turning her way from two feet away over and over. After some good conversation, I offered her a ride to the train station downtown since I lived close to there. I mentioned that we should make some music together sometime and she gave me her MySpace card. The rest is history.

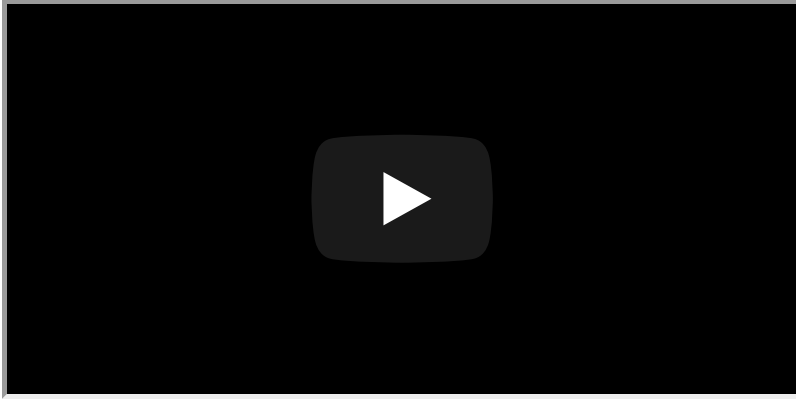
Jen: Strictly...at 1st J Eddy also possessed the alluring quality of a man of culture. I wanted 2 things in a man that were not easy to find: 1.) Finding a rock star to do music with 2.) Marrying the musical rock star

— — — — — Your personal musical influences seem as incongruent from one another as possible yet they find a comfortable balance with The New Zeitgeist (<http://www.thenewzeitgeist.com/>), did it take time to develop its cohesion or was it immediate?

Jen: Ha, really? There was immediate chemistry, yet as we explored places we had never been between his twangy-blusterous grit and my tailored velvet, our songwriting individually wandered untested roads, and our sound became more intimately entwined. I suppose what helped our unlikely and risky launch is the somewhat later exploration in my 20's of my personal music taste and, therefore, probably the largest genre evolution out of the two of us. For me, mostly Church Gospel songs to uh, rap and punk in middle school, then indie folk, and finally, what we identify loosely as roots/Americana now. I was definitely at a point in my music where I wasn't being challenged creatively and feeling a musically plateau as a solo artist just before we met.

Eddy: Jen had such a remarkable natural ability to sing amazing harmonies. When we met, I was asking her to accompany me on my old material and she made it ten times better! She was working on her sound at the time and wasn't sure she wanted to abandon that and start a new band. We started the first album in the summer of 2103 and released it in December of 2014. That was The New Zeitgeist. We met as acoustic artists but she

had encouraged me to return to playing electric guitar and, I couldn't have been happier getting back to my rock roots on our second album which was released in summer of 2017.



————— ***How does the writing process work for you? does it vary song to song?***

Jen: I'm really great at listening for arrangement and structure (Evaluating Eddy's songs), but Eddy's also greatly improved the musical riffs of my songs. I'm currently trying to expand my writing process beyond waiting for the inspiration of that flaky muse, but traditionally it's very lyrically dominant for me and the melody drives the song. The voice creates the music and the instrument, many times comes later. Since my main instrument is my voice, I feel if you have a strong melody you have a strong song. We're also opening up our songwriting experience to collaboration in smaller ways, but not necessarily co-writing. We're both very dominant songwriters and I think it's an intimate and personal experience for each of us.

Eddy: I am not at all disciplined as a songwriter. I listen for the music in my head. Either I will find a hook or a riff that I like, or stumble across one while practicing guitar. It may be a thought or an idea. I think choruses are meant to connect with. If I find one, then I try to write a song around it. I do enjoy using a word processor, using word documents to create a poetic structure, and then filling it in around the hook. I still will write down a phrase on a piece of paper if it comes to me. When I was at NIU in the late 80's, I had the privilege of attending a poetry workshop with the legendary Gwendolyn Brooks. I read a song of mine to her and she responded with something I have taken to heart until this day. 'Revise, revise, revise.' I try to practice that.

————— ***Is there a tune of yours that you feel is the quintessential representation of who and what you are?***

Jen: Definitely “Desert Rose,” (<http://www.thenewzeitgeist.com/>) since it’s the most original on lyrics and music, and a classic sappy love tune. I never wrote a personally real or convincing love song before that, and also pushed myself to write outside my genre zone of comfort—an ode to classic country.

Eddy: Of my songs on our recent album, “Myths and Mortals” (<http://www.thenewzeitgeist.com/>), I have a difficult time choosing one. I think it has to be “Lack of Linear Thought” (<http://www.thenewzeitgeist.com/>). It is my 60’s dream pop song. The cast of characters playing on this track includes Alton Smith on the Farfisa, whom I think takes it over the top! I was playing though a sweet little vintage Supro amp on most of the album and made the most of it on this track, too!

----- ***The New Zeitgeist (<http://www.thenewzeitgeist.com/>) has a lot in common with the late 60’s folk movement in terms of lyrics and messaging: were your parents hippies? What did you grow up listening to in the house?***

Jen: My Dad was definitely a “Jesus Hippie”! Definitely no for my mom! They were opposites musically as he would have the oldies playing in the car and he was especially a lover of classic folk like Dylan while my Mom preferred Italian opera.

Eddy: My dad was definitely not a hippie, but he did appreciate the pop music of the 60’s era. His favorite groups were The Everly Brothers, The Righteous Brothers, The Ventures, and The Animals. He would say that once The Beatles went to see the Maharishi they became too “out there” for him. I remember my parents having Elton John’s Greatest Hits, Jim Croce, and the red and blue vinyl Beatles Greatest Hits. The blue album, which included “While My Guitar Gently Weeps”, was my favorite, of course! My mom and dad listened to the radio with us a lot throughout the 70’s and the 80’s. My mom wasn’t a hippie, either. She liked to dance to good music and we would watch *American Bandstand*. Her favorites included Bob Seger and the Silver Bullet Band. On a further note, my grandfather was an accomplished accordionist and he performed with my father on drums at VFW halls around the SW suburbs. We would hear them practice often and that would include hearing a lot of polkas and waltzes. I loved it! Hearing that made me want to make music, too!

————— **Would you guys ever consider expanding the presentation to include a full band and, if so, what would be your instrumentation wish list?**

Jen: Oh, yes! The recent album *Myths and Mortals* (2017) was the real creative impetus for our dream instrumentation at every turn. The opportunity to work with some really great Chicago musicians, including Gerald Dowd (drums), John Abbey (bass), Alton Smith (organ), Nora Barton (cello), and Austin pedal steel extraordinaire Lloyd Maines, strengthened us to be tighter musicians and more intimately entwined as a duo. A lot of those songs inspired Pedal Steel, Bass, and Percussion to be added to our duo's mandolin, acoustic, and electric, but I can see also stripping it down to an even more simple roots package with an upright, chains/rattles, and dobro.

Eddy: For me, there is nothing like playing in a great band situation. Jen was very conscious of the different sounds she wanted when planning 'Myths and Mortals,' and those included a rhythm section. She insisted on the pedal steel and after hearing the initial takes in the studio, I was convinced of almost every idea she had. Playing with the truly great musicians that performed on "Myths and Mortals" was a dream come true and I would wish to bring them together again in the future if possible.





————— ***What were the first 3 albums (for each of you) you purchased as a kid? Which is the best?***

Jen: I probably didn't purchase my own music until I was 12. My very 1st, ahem, (cassette!) was The Beach Boys' "Surfin' USA" with the cartoon cover...I mean, hey, I grew up in Florida. J Then to CD's, Grammatical Revolution (1999) by Christian hip hop group named Grits, and definitely my most memorable album, The Anatomy of the Tongue in Cheek (2001) from punk-rock band Reliant K, which is very worn and whose several albums really motivated my learning of guitar chords.

Eddy: This has been challenging to remember. My parents were in the habit of occasionally purchasing a new album. I remember receiving as a gift the album 'Double Vision' by Foreigner in what must have been the Christmas of '78. In the following year with my own money for the first time, I must have wanted to buy a Kiss record, but my

parents “encouraged” me to buy something else first, so I bought the first Foreigner album and then the Ace Frehley solo album! I think the third album I bought was ‘Double Platinum’.

————— ***What do you guys like to listen to together these days if you are going to pop on an ‘album’?***

Jen: Hmmm...it’s not that easy! It depends on mood, flexibility, and activity—like driving, or...other things! I think Zep has done us no harm, some Johnny Cash, some Neil Young, or even U2, but usually it’s nothing newer than the 80s or 90s. J I’m embarrassed to admit how much we just listen to our album!

Eddy: In the car, Zep is our go to, or 93.1 WXRT. At home, it’s U2.

————— ***What’s the best thing about Chicago and ‘our scene’?***

Jen: I’ve found that it’s sometimes the less appearance-driven and smaller profile neighborhood dives that have the strongest music influence because they operate more at a community grassroots level and are not caught up with ticket sales or official advertisement. While we greatly respect some of the finest names in Chicago’s music scene, some of the best recent times for us have been the meaningful connections we make up-close like Lizard Lounge’s 2017 Ugly Sweater Party singing ‘Silent Night’ to be followed by an outstanding woman just from Ireland jumping on stage to belt a cappella a traditional tearjerker.

Eddy: I really enjoy all the different little bars and the different music scenes at each one, especially those places that haven’t changed much since the 90’s or at which no more than ten people regularly attend! Also, the *Old Town School of Folk Music* and the singer/songwriter scene there has been really important for us, and we really appreciate all the great people and musicians that we’ve had the pleasure to get to know there. We attend a lot of shows that the people we’ve met at the Old Town perform.

A new show bubbles up in which musical duo couples compete for the affection of millions of young Americans. In the finals, you are forced to dress up like and perform a couple classic couple duo number by Donnie & Marie, Captain & Tennille, Sonny & Cher, Paul & Linda McCartney, John & Yoko, Stevie & Lindsey, Ike & Tina or any other of your choice, what songs do you chose and which do you think you could pull off best?

Jen: That sounds like loads of fun...well, my 1st instinct is to be our real-life heroic couple, Piggy and Kermit. However, there's a history behind the song "I've Got You Babe" by Sonny and Cher being played at a party in our pre-dating hangouts which really sparked the idea of getting romantically involved with Eddy. We also walked up the aisle to that song. J

Eddy: It was at my long-time buddy Jeff's birthday party singing karaoke in the summer of 2011 at which Jen and I sang "I've Got You Babe". I think that would be the one!

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