

radio  
radio



# Experience

Music Art Culture Roundup



September 2019

Volume. 1, Issue 8

**22** Sirsy

Melanie and Rich Give us a page from their touring travelogue.

**26** Moriah Formica

Having found acclaim, Moriah strikes out to forge her own path.

Also Featuring  
**Eddie Munoz!**

[WWW.RADIORADIOX.COM](http://WWW.RADIORADIOX.COM)

**FREE**



# The Hard Fought Path to Playing



Photo provided

■ Tom Atkins at Lake George Beach Club.

*The struggle to learn the craft of music unites all who pick up an instrument in a war, and Tom Atkins is in the foxholes.*

## By Liam Sweeny

If you've kicked your shoes off for the day, and the beer in the fridge is a quick second from being in your hand 'cause it's five o'clock somewhere and you want to hit that spot in your ears as well as your belly, the Tom Atkins Band's got a jam for you.

Frontman and band namesake Tom Atkins, bassist Mike Persico and drummer Bob Napierski are

going all out, blending a handful of notes and beats like a certain famous man from Kentucky blends herbs and spices, to deliver a sweet bucket of extra melodic love.

We sit down with Tom Atkins and talk turkey (or chicken.)

**RRX:** You have a pretty interesting groove, something I can't pin down to any one genre, not fully. Definite rock core, but some blues here, jazz there, alternative

around the edges. It's a great mix of sounds. How would you describe what you do if you had to give what we could call "the elevator pitch"?

**TA:** Well thank you, that's praise I love to hear. I've never been in one genre fully. Full genre, not full genre. My feeble attempt at an elevator pitch is that my band serves up a stewy gumbo of classic rock and shredded punk with a dash of power blues. I love filling the air with a loud guitar and putting everything I have into it, and I try to focus on making every note be an honest emotional expression. I have been

so lucky and to be able to be still performing music today. Playing music thrills me to my core. To have been playing with the same drummer for twenty years is an incredible blessing. I have always been really lucky to make great friends for a long time, but my drummer, Bob Napierski, is totally my groove.

**RRX:** I hear that you were self-taught, and that you trained yourself finger-by-finger. So here's a question from my inner guitar-nerd; was this your fret hand or your strumming hand, or both? And how did you go about that?

**TA:** Everyone is technically self-taught. Someone might teach you something but YOU make the connection for you. It's so funny looking back at those first awkward notes. It was my fret hand. I was so bad initially I thought maybe I'd have to learn how to play left handed guitar because my left fretting hand was completely uncoordinated. It was pretty clear, I am not at all a "born" musician. I was terrified of playing in front of a teacher. I had tremendous stage fright, but the rush and thrill of performing, once it's on its on, I believe the phrase is "the ham is cooking."

Anyway, I am not self-taught any more than anyone else. Everything that I can play today, I had to really work at it. I was trying that 1, 2, 3, 4 warm up exercise, one finger per fret, and I was really frustrated because it literally felt like I could not separate my fingers at all. I would try to move one finger and all of them would move.

So one night after having the guitar for a few months, I was determined to get it done. I tried so hard to do that exercise, for so long that one night that I fell asleep sitting down with the guitar. I woke up in the morning and I was finally able to just move one finger at a time. I had absolutely no stretching ability, I could barely go two frets with all four fingers. But I worked at it every day. Now I still warm up with that. Writing a guitar journal basically keeps my chops fresh. (That's the application I am working on.)

**RRX:** One of the things I love about interviewing bands is that

you all get to go out in front of crowds and share what you've created, what you love. Do you have any shows that made all the work, all the practicing, worth it? I'm talking more than every show does; one in particular?

**TA:** I'd have to say when my Band THICK opened for Blue Oyster Cult back in 1999, that was one show that I am really proud of. But as far as my own band, my first show in Montreal was exciting since it was the first Tom Atkins Band show with me as the singer, and we have done so many since then. We had a show at the Arsenal City Tavern in October last year that was completely packed, wall to wall people; drunk people were dancing on my footpedals. I loved every second of it. A hot sweaty drunken mess. We were all having a great time, some maybe too much.

For me personally, performing Little Wing with guitarist Eric Johnson, that was one for my tombstone – "Here lies Tom. He played Little Wing with Eric Johnson. He died a happy man."

**RRX:** Recording in a studio is like the famous Tolstoy quote from *War and Peace*, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." Everything comes out in the studio. Last year you recorded a CD that we had talked about on the blog, as well as your personal takeaways from the time you've spent in the studio for that. Anything to share?

**TA:** It was the first CD that I'd written and sang on all of the tracks, and it was a real struggle because it was also the first CD

I completed while having a full-time job and being a father and a husband. It was challenging emotionally because I know my guitar, but I am only beginning to really learn my voice, what I can do and can't do. And that was really emotionally intense battling the fear that I had to overcome as a singer, especially in today's musical entertainment environment where "the voice" is more important than the song or even the words. I am proud of my effort, and I look forward to the next one with greater confidence and I plan on working with a producer next time, one who knows how to coach performances to be as good as possible. It was also the first CD where I knew my limits and hired a mixing and mastering engineer. (I learned from my last CD "Guitar Wash" that just because I know my way around a studio doesn't mean that my ears are up to the challenge.)

I can track what I need to, and leave the rest of the cooking to people who have all their ear hairs. For my latest CD, Peter Jones tracked all the songs and was a real professional and did an incredible job with his mixes. My long time friend from my college days in Fredonia, Robert Kulhman of Root Cellar Studios, did the mastering job of a lifetime. The CD sounds so incredible because Bob and Mike and I really did our best to perform on it, and Peter and Rob really displayed their talented audio skills.

**RRX:** We here are a family, and we're looking to connect our long-lost cousins. We're also looking for stuff to put in the family

newsletter. Anybody out there you think we should know about? And what is in your near future?

**TA:** I was in Nashville this past April and was blown away by all of the talent in all the clubs. In a tiny club called Dee's country cocktail lounge, I was blown away by Jim Oblon. He is a top session guy in Nashville and his skill on guitar was incredible. His album *Sunset* was inspirational and I listened to it the whole drive home. I play guitar for my friend Doug Lawler who grew up in Rotterdam but moved to Nashville – Doug writes and puts out beautiful country music. I have wonderful friends down in Newburgh area, Jason Castlerlin's *Old Stone Church* has a few of my licks on there, really well produced record and good friends. Jason's band is Hillbilly Parade, they are awesome. And I have some incredibly talented musicians I have met at all my Vai camps and will be partying next month at NAMM (National Association of Music Merchants.) Chris Stark (from Hawaii) writes and performs beautiful instrumental guitar music and we are playing on each others future songs. I have a dear friend in Montreal Canada named Victor E who launched a new song earlier this year, might be RadioRadioX friendly. One more to keep an ear out for – Mick Hayes from Buffalo NY – tremendous talent. I want to get him in our area for a show, I think he is top tier one talent!

*This article has been edited for space. For the full article, please visit [www.radioradiox.com](http://www.radioradiox.com).*