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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

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# Mericana flying higher than an eagle

The ex-Murder City Sparrows guitarist is migrating down a new musical path

## musicpreview

### Jonny Mericana

With Jay Gilday  
Friday, 7 March at 8pm  
Axis Cafe Metro Room (10349 Jasper Avenue)

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Jonny Mericana is in a period of transformation and, in a way, instability.

You may remember him as the talented ex-guitarist of the well-known Edmonton band Murder City Sparrows. Normally, pushing the eject button on a rising act would leave a musician dejected, but Mericana doesn't regret the decision. The group's popularity was escalating, but that also meant an increased level of commitment from its members. He talks about his departure from the Sparrows and his new opportunities with chipper enthusiasm.

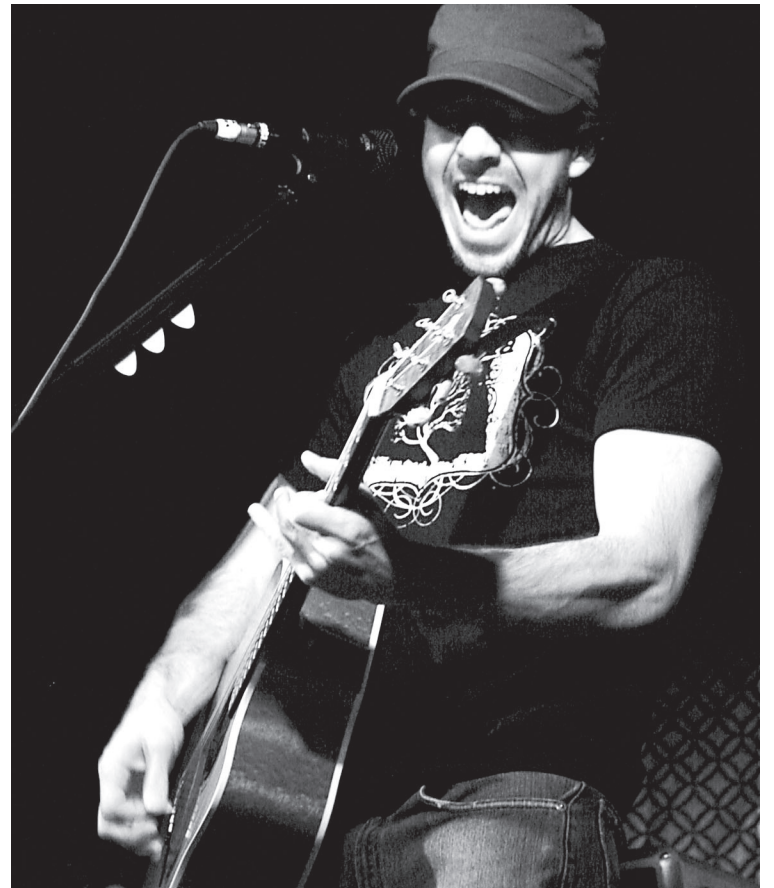
"I just wasn't 100-per-cent on board anymore, and at that point with that band, I felt I really needed to be," he explains. "At one point, I just made a decision that I was holding them back."

But this departure, far from ending his musical career, has launched it into a demanding, transient, and artistically free state—though that isn't to say he doesn't sometimes struggle with the loneliness and demanding nature of starting a solo project.

"Starting over now is a challenge. I'm not from Edmonton, and my whole life up until the time I left the group was completely the band," he says.

With nothing but spare time outside of music, Mericana has taken his newfound creative freedom and focused his energy on a sound his old fans might not have expected from him. The change began when he picked up his acoustic and took off to the folk music circuit to play for Melissa Majeau.

"Completely entering a different live music venue and doing the folk festivals was a lot of work to get up to



speed, but it helped me start over, start fresh," Mericana explains.

He admits that by the time his debut solo album rolls around, the acoustic performances currently dominating his schedule will become less and less frequent. But that experience hasn't been without its positives. The change has given him a chance to test himself and his songwriting ability on a different, more challenging stage, and to move at his own pace through the evolution of his new group, Mericana.

"[The solo performances] are something I'd like to do once in a while, but it's more transitional at this point than anything else," he explains. "For me, if a song can stand up [solo], then you've got a good song. From a songwriter's point of view, if I can pull a song together and hold it for an audience just

like that, I know I'm onto something."

Although his recent work is more reminiscent of a cross breed between The Tea Party and Jack Johnson, he acknowledges that he's far from done playing with a band. His upcoming album will feature a full rock ensemble—but for now, he's content to test his mettle with solo performances, letting the acoustic numbers he's working on develop during the later recording process.

"I'm at the starting point with the bare bones of the songs themselves," he stresses. "When I go into production, it's going to explode into a whole new thing. The songs will be developed as the recording takes place. I want to get some strings on the record, which won't transfer live, of course. But it'll be epic."

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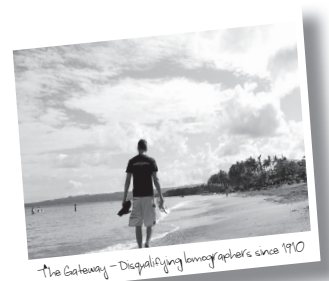
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