

Welcome Mad Harmony

Tyler Pantella

*“Will you jerk away, tearing me down / To sip sweet liquid while slipping at the seams /
It seems most important to me to know such things and to dream, so easily”*

-Italian Edition

“Jack is a fox. I would sell my arm to tap that. I don’t really know the guy. He’s absolutely fab, though,” an admirer of his confessed to me. Jack Derricourt, local musician and celebrity, is magnetic. It’s understandable why people are so drawn to him. He’s attractive and his mind seems to be constantly occupied with intelligent topics. He seems to have otherworldly wisdom, like a skinny Buddha with afro-like caramel curls.

Jack Derricourt has always been Jack to me. We were both heavily involved in the Victoria music scene in our high school years and were always at the same shows. Even though I hang out with him and have known him for years, I still find him perplexing. He definitely looks like he was born to be a singer in a band. His tall, lean figure attracts attention even in a crowded coffee shop. Serious Coffee is his meeting place of choice, possibly because it’s one of the few Victoria downtown coffee shops open in the late evening. A dark-haired girl peers over the top edge of her book as he approaches the counter.

“I’ll have a hot apple cider, please,” he says to the attentive barista, effortlessly polite and charming. He admits he spends too much of his time around coffee since he works at the University of Victoria Munchie Bar. We make our way to an upstairs couch with our full cups, the engulfing apple aroma reminding me of pie. We sit and, in the

process, he spills a few drops on the table. “Some mornings when I haven’t had breakfast and I’m giving people their drinks, I’m just like ‘h-h-here you go,’” he says, twitching his hand. We laugh and relax in the comfortable setting, a light murmur of chatter and tinkling of laptop keys providing a background.

Jack always seems much more interested in talking about his band than himself. When prompted for an introduction and brief autobiography, he hesitates and looks uncomfortable with the question, squirming and shifting his eyes. He’s much more interested in talking about forms of art, being an English major at the University of Victoria and a member of a successful local band. He loves latching onto the topic of music especially with me, knowing we are commonly versed in many bands considered obscure by popular society. As for his own band, he sees it as a passionate quintet of progressive music. Jack’s band, Italian Edition, has had an eventful two years. It has put out a well-received album and have played with big-name acts like Danko Jones and Hedley. When asked about Hedley though, Jack’s response is instant.

“I hate them,” he says. “They’re not music.” Jack’s peaceful mood shifts briefly to resentment as he leans forward, setting his cup down. He’s particularly upset that they don’t write their own music.

On Danko Jones, however, his response is the opposite.

“He was awesome. He was so cool.” The Canadian alternative rock band, named after the frontman, has been together since 1996 and rose to international fame with a self-produced album. “You see the live show and just get it,” says Jack. Jack’s band follows a similar model, based on hard work rather than Hedley’s money and hired songwriters.

“Take it like it is / Grab yourself another drink / Playtime is for kids / Paid to act, not think”

-Italian Edition

Someone calls from downstairs that the Serious Coffee is closing. We're forced to brainstorm other options. It's nearly 10 p.m. on a Monday night. We settle on QV's, a downtown Victoria diner that is nearly always open. Walking from a coffee shop, we walk past two drunk guys outside Monty's Strip Club.

“How's it going, you having a good night? Huh? Yeah? Yeah?” one of them says as we walk by. We get a few metres away and he slurs, “Hey! What do you think your asses are doin' over there?” I laugh into my cup of apple cider, spraying a bunch onto my arm. Jack looks placid as usual, seeming not to notice the event.

QV's has a loud, chatty atmosphere. There is a jukebox in the front and the place seems casual and unrestrained, more like a cafeteria than a restaurant. Jack spots some friends of his and greets them, then buys some yam fries and sits on a stool by a window. I finally get him to talk about his past.

Jack was born in London, England on April 18, 1987. After this, he traveled a lot. His family moved to Brighton, the capital of the indie rock scene in the UK. He didn't get involved in it because he was more into Thomas the Tank Engine at that point. He moved to Victoria with his mom to live near his grandpa, who was diagnosed with

prostate cancer. He reflects on this in a positive manner, happy because he got “six more years of knowing this really awesome guy and learning a lot just by being around him.”

Jack thinks Canada’s a better place to live than the UK right now. The middle-class people he’s met from England, especially London, who he would have been growing up with are “all complete assholes,” he says, looking out the window of QV’s into the illuminated night. “They’re just so materialistic and, I don’t know, yobby?”

“You’re on the 9:30 AM train to destruction in your magazine heresy. You’re living naked for you, not me.”

-Italian Edition

I ask Jack how he ended up getting into music. He grabs a yam fry between his thumb and forefinger, puts it in his mouth, and chews.

“I get a lot of my musical taste from my mom. In 1969 when a Stooges album came out, like the same week that Woodstock was going on, she bought the record and sat around getting high in her room.” He recalls his dad’s involvement in the Birmingham jazz and blues scenes as well, recalling when “guys like Howlin’ Wolf and Muddy Waters and all the big blues guys would come through.” Jack speeds up again, something that has become predictable whenever the focus shifts away from him. “My dad saw like Jimi Hendrix play and Pink Floyd do The Wall and stuff like that so he has all these cool stories that he drops.”

A mutual friend of ours, Mike Loranger, hinted to me about Jack’s adolescent life before I came to know him. Jack was part of a group of kids nicknamed the “Chapters

Kids” as a young teenager. The term now refers to the kids who skateboard downtown, although much of the original culture is gone.

Jack admits this, telling me how he used to skate in Gordon Head, an area in Victoria, and how the group always ended up partying downtown. “I just kind of went with the group, like people who were into like good punk music, not the shitty pop punk, people who listened to like Dead Kennedies and Pistols.” Thinking back, he doesn’t understand his actions. “I was probably too high to remember most of it,” he jokes to justify the stage of his life. He doesn’t look on it too fondly, accepting it as part of the past. “As soon as the band Pushing Up Daisies started, I just left that all behind and just hung out with those guys as much as possible.”

“We’re mortally impaired / Just mortally impaired / Undecidedly declared / So rich and oh so rare”

-Pushing Up Daisies

I know Jack because of Pushing Up Daisies. Started when Jack was in Grade 8 at Cedar Hill Junior Secondary, the band was together until near the end of his high school years at Mount Doug. Pushing Up Daisies embodied the all-ages music scene in Victoria. Jack fronted the band with his excited, smooth, mid-range voice and jerky dance moves, projecting complete confidence and an attitude that was lost in pop music. Everyone who saw the band understood the strength and vigor behind it. But, Jack reflects, it was a high school band and they never really explored territory like touring and playing bar shows. Jack reflects on his first moment singing for the band.

“I was doing homework or something,” he remembers, “I used to come out and like, watch them play and put some earplugs in.” One of the band members suggested he try his hand at vocals while they were trying to cover the Velvet Underground song “Oh Sweet Nothing.” It was the first song they did together and “just sort of worked.” There was never really any question about it afterwards, they just went along with it.

“I can see houses for miles. Green gas hanging over them all. Re-erect; refurbish. The untold story of a master plan. As good as any fairy tale you know off of TV shows where they persecute the truth.”

-Italian Edition

Jack’s current band, Italian Edition, started when Peter, the soon-to-be guitarist, was wearing a Moneen shirt in a math class. Bassist Matt Morrison got excited because it was a band he also loved, and they made plans to form a band of their own. It was 2005 and both were in their second year as students at the University of Victoria. The drummer from Matt’s past band, Lythic Blue, returned from Ontario and joined up with the project.

“Matt really liked Pushing Up Daisies a lot which was really cool because he was in the bigger band and we always looked up to Lythic Blue. Just the fact that they played at our school and had this amazing live show.” Jack looks up and seems to fondly remember the show. I think I see his eyes sparkle but no, it’s just the reflection of a car driving along the street outside QV’s. Jack continues, “They were totally into the all-ages scene and being a part of it. And it was so whole-hearted, it didn’t seem fake or

preconceived or anything. It was just guys playing music for kids who want to have fun on a Friday or Saturday, which was so great about the Victoria scene back then. Which is what you and I got into at the tail end of, because it seems to have gone to shit now.”

Jack is right. Between 2002 and 2005, when I was going to nearly every single all-ages show I heard about, there was a different atmosphere. Back then, everyone was excited about seeing his or her friends play in a band. Show promoters would put up a few posters around town and over a hundred kids would show up, even if they knew nothing about any of the bands.

“There used to be shows that were nothing but ska bands, you know? And now that just seems like such a weird idea,” Jack says and sighs. Ska, an upbeat style of music similar to reggae and typically involving trumpets and saxophones, seems to have fallen out of today’s young people’s interests. I remember dancing with Jack and our friends at ska shows until we were too sweaty and tired to keep moving.

“Painting crosses on allies / Selling stories from the skies”

-Italian Edition

While Italian Edition was in the early stages of development, Jack was trying his singing elsewhere, with what he considers “a train wreck of a band.” He concentrates downwards and there is a bit of scorn in his voice.

“I was trying to work with some other band which were, I don’t know, total indie pricks in the end. Maybe that’s why I’m so disinclined towards handclaps and tubas, just

because I had to deal with people who were very gifted but ended up being very manipulative and stupid.”

Luckily, Italian Edition was coming together around the same time. They asked Jack to come out and, like with Pushing Up Daisies, it “just kind of worked.” Jack laughs, remembering that the drummer, Jay, admitted he was really hesitant to try Jack out but agreed it worked really well. After the first practice, the band was comfortable with each other. Everyone in the band was intelligent and liked a lot of the same music. “You say like, Refused or At the Drive In or the Constantines and we’re all just like ‘Ooh!’” He gestures his checkered arms to act out the sound.

I’ve known Jack to have a very specific taste in clothes. Right now, he is wearing a green plaid button-up shirt with long, skinny sleeves. In the past I have seen him wearing a variety of patterned shirts, fitted jeans, and vintage-looking jackets. Somehow, they are always long enough to fit his lanky body, without looking baggy or awkwardly tight. I ask him about his thoughts on fashion.

“I don’t think I have any interest in clothes,” he responds, shocked. “I just kind of wear what’s comfortable. I don’t know, do you like clothes? You look like you like clothes, you wear them a lot.”

“Well isn’t this exciting / isn’t this, isn’t this exciting / Moving from disappointment / into the new appointment”

-Pushing Up Daisies

Jack is excited about what's to come for Italian Edition. The next album is going to be free for people to download. They hope to make enough money for it in one show. Sugar allowed them to rent the performance space, free-of-charge, if they get 300 people out. Jack understands their reasoning, knowing they'll have enough people buying drinks for it to cover the rental fee.

“All the other bands playing the show have agreed not to take anything from it, we'll give them some food and some beer and stuff. And then we'll take that money and just make an eight song EP super quick and then just put it on for pay-as-much-as-you-want Radiohead-style”

I ask him where this zeal comes from. “Just trying to play music in like, the turn of the millenium seems kind of exciting anyway,” he decides. “I guess I just kind of found a place in Victoria that is well established and a music scene that is very rich.”

“The love we used to lead / Opening closed doors / Gauging the figures”

-Pushing Up Daisies

Jack is humble, not seeking to flaunt his charm or intelligence. His conversations with me are down-to-earth and I only get a hint of his university student persona. I know that, like me, he took the English Advanced Placement exam in high school. Still, he doesn't adopt the language and mannerisms of a higher mind. Jack is self-sacrificing and sharing, having given me a microphone and offered money towards a self-publishing project of mine. We walk to a bus stop and I say goodbye, knowing my respect for Jack has grown.