

Tim Easton  
*Porcupine* bio  
Chris Morris

Like the bristly critter of its title, Tim Easton's album *Porcupine* has some spikes in its hindquarters. And the Ohio-born, Joshua Tree, California-based singer-songwriter says the primarily aggressive style of the record was definitely by design.

"I wanted to make some noise again," Easton explains. "I'd been making some sonically conservative albums out here in California, with a little less of that Midwestern bite that was part of the sound I had been making with my band when I was growing up."

Easton describes *Porcupine* – his fourth New West Records album, succeeding *The Truth About Us* (2001), *Break Your Mother's Heart* (2003), and *Ammunition* (2006) -- as "not a 'coming full circle' kind of thing, but more the center point of a figure-8 where I am passing back through on my way to many other directions." The collection reunites him with producers Brad Jones and Robin Eaton, who played an important role in the early stages of his recording career.

"Brad Jones recorded my first album, with the band the Haynes Boys," Easton recalls. "He called me out of the blue and left a long message on my machine, back in Ohio. He was the first person in the music business that owned a studio and was a producer who reached out to me and said, 'I want to work with you.' It was just a matter of time before I got back to him, because he really helped me get started."

After the Haynes Boys disbanded in the late '90s, Jones and Eaton produced Easton's debut solo album *Special 20*, issued by Heathen Records in 1999 and re-released by New West in 2001.

Easton thought that the production team would be the ideal collaborators to midwife the punchier album he envisioned. "I knew I wanted to make a louder record, right off the bat. I think that's a phase for every songwriter who's involved in both folk music and rock 'n' roll – they make the loud ones and the quiet ones. Steve Earle, who's a great example and influence, is like that. He's quiet, then loud."

The core band for the *Porcupine* sessions was convened at Club Roar, Eaton's Nashville studio, which he built next door to Jones' facility Alex the Great, where *Special 20* was cut a decade ago – and where the musicians slept, and conducted some informal nighttime recording dates, during their Music City stay.

Sharing guitar chores with Easton was Kenny Vaughn, the instrumental spark plug of Marty Stuart's group the Fabulous Superlatives. Easton says of the virtuoso musician, who was previously the guitarist in his friend Lucinda Williams' band, "I knew right away, before I even called Brad and Robin, that I wanted Kenny Vaughn to do this. Brad and I had discussed this across the years. That guy can play anything. He's got a lot of style and a lot of knowledge of the history of music. He can play any style well, and learn fast. When Kenny would ask me what I want for a particular song, I would just say 'have a good time'"

In the rhythm section, Easton says, "I wanted to bring that Central Ohio sound back into my thing." The drum chair was taken by Sam Brown, formerly with the ferocious Columbus punk band the New Bomb Turks. The bassist was another familiar face: Matt Surgeson, the bassist of the Haynes Boys, who also worked on *Special 20*.

Basic tracks for *Porcupine* were recorded live, with few songs requiring more than three complete takes. Columbus violinist Megan Palmer arranged and recorded the album's string parts in close collaboration with Jones. "That was a really cool part of recording – watching those two stack the strings," Easton says. "I didn't know Brad knew all those words: 'Play it fortissimo, with a little bit of adagio.' Damn!"

The lone bit of off-site recording, for the song "The Young Girls," was performed by the soulful Memphis diva Susan Marshall, with Easton serving as hands-on engineer. "The album was done, so I was driving back to California, and three hours after I left Nashville I was in Memphis at Susan Marshall's house. Jeff Powell, her husband, is a Grammy-winning engineer, and luckily he was there, because I was new on my Pro Tools. I had a laptop and a Mojave mic that [Los Angeles producer] Dusty Wakeman had set me up with. There are four Susan Marshalls stacked on there. It's beautiful."

While there are songs on *Porcupine* – "The Young Girls," "A Stone's Throw Away," "Long Cold Night in Bed" and the pop-folk jangle of "Seventh Wheel" – that will appeal to fans of the acoustic-based *Ammunition*, numbers like "Burgundy Red," "Broke My Heart," "Get What I Got," and "Baltimore" bristle with the rock 'n' roll energy that Easton heard in his head as he prepared to make the album. He chalks up these bracing results to the frankly old-fashioned way the record was made.

"There's a certain satisfaction to getting all the sounds down with the band in the studio in one place at one time to make the song happen," he says. "I love the Beatles as much as anybody, and overdubs are extremely fun to do, but when you have a great band to get the meat and potatoes down quickly, without a click track and with just the feel and energy of human beings making music, then you are bound to be more satisfied as a listener, too." You will undoubtedly agree.

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