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5 Questions With ... George Thorogood

Thorogood, who plays the House of Blues Friday, July 23, on his music, his new album, Bob Dylan and more. Plus an interview with opening act Jimmie "The Jersey Outlaw" Lee.

By Ray Schweibert

Posted Jul. 21, 2010 | Comments: 0 | [Add Comment](#)



Mr. T and the Destroyers of Delaware.

Although he says he hasn't lived in Delaware for nearly 25 years ["They asked me politely to leave, and I accommodated them," he tells *Atlantic City Weekly*], George Thorogood is one of those artists who will likely be inextricably linked forever to the state that unleashed him on the world. If you came of age in the Delaware Valley during the 1970s and '80s, you're sure to recollect the rambunctious, raspy-voiced rocker as being all over the radio airwaves back then with his band the Delaware Destroyers. And all First State residents are proud to call Thorogood their own.

The band's best-known hit is probably "Bad to the Bone," penned by Thorogood and released on the album of the same name in 1982, and one of the Destroyers' five gold-certified studio albums of 16 total. Their latest studio effort is called *The Dirty Dozen*, which is available on both vinyl and CD formats from Capitol/EMI records, and includes six new recordings and six fan favorites. It can be purchased at georgethorogood.com or at any of the band's latest tour stops, which includes the House of Blues at Showboat in Atlantic City on Friday, July 23, at 8pm (tickets are \$35 and \$40).

The Destroyers — comprised of Thorogood on guitar and vocals, Billy Blough on bass, Jeff Simon on drums, Buddy Leach on saxophone and Jim Suhler on guitar — also made hits with personal spins on such blues standards as Hank Williams' "Move It On Over," John Lee Hooker's "House Rent Boogie (One Bourbon, One Scotch, One Beer)," Bo Diddley's "Who Do You Love?" and Elmore James' "Madison Blues" Thorogood spoke to *AC Weekly* by phone recently.

How did that hard-charging, blues-rock style of music get to be your personal preference?

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It was just something I was exposed to as a teenager, and at the same time it was something I just adapted to very easily. My singing voice doesn't exactly have the range of a Tom Jones or a Rod Stewart or someone like that. So I listened to how far guys like Howlin' Wolf or John Lee Hooker or Johnny Cash went with their voices, and with the style of the blues being very primitive — one chord, two chords — I found that I could get behind that. And when Jeff Simon stepped in [Simon, Blough and Thorogood have performed together since the 1970s; Leach and Suhler joined the Destroyers much later] he applied a very strong, faster beat to it. Everything evolved from there. It was like I told him, "This is what I can do with a guitar," and Jeff took it to the next level. I got the people's interest and Jeff got them out on the dance floor.

I've read some favorable reviews of The Dirty Dozen online. Are you and the band pleased with the final product?

Pleased. Surprised. Astonished. It includes six of our songs that I wouldn't call classics or among our higher-profile songs, but ones that our more-or-less diehard fans would recognize, plus six new cuts. We're still pumping them out and selling them at the shows every night. We did a show with Bob Dylan in Los Angeles and we gave him a copy, and he seemed really quite touched by it.

I didn't really have too much to do with [putting the album on vinyl]. The people at Capitol thought it might be a clever idea as a promotional or marketing tool for nostalgic reasons, and it just caught on.

Are your live performances similar to your latest studio recording in how you blend fan favorites with your new material?

Most of the time you go into a studio thinking, "What can we play live?" We're visual artists, but we need new material to keep shows fresh, so we try to find three or four songs that we mix in on the tours. In the old days the first two albums were the stuff we were performing live anyway, like any band, and as time went on we said we needed some new stuff. What's great is that as time goes on, and after performing for 20, 25 years, the fans want to hear your catalogue anyway, so it gets to the point where we say, "Why are we knocking ourselves out to do 12 new songs when they only want us to do three or four news ones anyway?"

On your Web site you mention that you found out that Randy Newman was a fan of yours and that surprised you. Why?

I'm surprised that anybody is [laughs], but when I ran into Randy — who's one of the greatest songwriters ever, let's face it — and got good feedback from guys like him and Jeff Beck and Bob Dylan, that's when I started to take what I do a little more seriously. I mean, when people like Randy Newman, Brian Wilson, Paul Simon, Bob Dylan and Jeff Beck appreciate what you're doing, I think that would astonish anyone. But it's entertainment and you just never know what entertains people. I was told that Laurence Olivier was a big fan of the Three Stooges, so no matter who you are or what level you're at or whatever your genius may be, you never know who's gonna be diggin' what you're doin', so I just have to run with that.

Are you still a big baseball fan? I read where you used to play semi-pro ball in your younger years.

Well, I still watch it on TV, but it's not anything like what I used to be as a kid. I mean I don't carry around baseball cards anymore or trade them in gym class or put them in the spokes of my bicycle. I was a big fan of the Wilmington Blue Rocks when they were a minor league affiliate of the Phillies [now with the Kansas City Royals].


Outlaw Opener



The House of Blues at Showboat will have an all-Delaware Valley edge to it this Friday night, July 23, when Jimmie "The Jersey Outlaw" Lee kicks off the concert for George Thorogood and the Delaware Destroyers. Doors open 7pm and the show starts at 8pm.

A high-energy country rock singer/songwriter who's a dentist by primary vocation, Lee recently released a live CD from a sold-out show he performed in Las Vegas. Among the CD's 15 tracks is the fan-favorite single "Let's Go!" — described as an "in-your-face country rock extravaganza" that Lee turned into a YouTube video filmed at the Whiskey Tango in Philadelphia. Other songs penned by Lee include "Kickin' Ass," "Crazy Bitch," "Forever 29," "Gimme A Holler," "Cross Country Four Wheel Drive," and the tune he deems his theme song, "Country Rocker."




"My real job is a dentist, and a friend of mine, Chuck Darrow [entertainment reporter for the Philadelphia Daily News], calls me the dentist by day, the rocker by night," Lee tells *Atlantic City Weekly*. "I write all my



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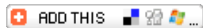
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stuff and a Philly producer [Grammy nominated David Ivory] helps me produce it and put the band together to perform live at shows.

“Unless you’re a musician and you have that passion and can’t get rid of it, it’s hard for others to understand why I do this,” says Lee. “You don’t do it for the money or because you want to become famous. I’m not making any money — I’m spending money — but I feel I’m making a product that’s really good. I call it high-horsepower country rock that sizzles. I liken it to [country stars] Big & Rich and Gretchen Wilson.”

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