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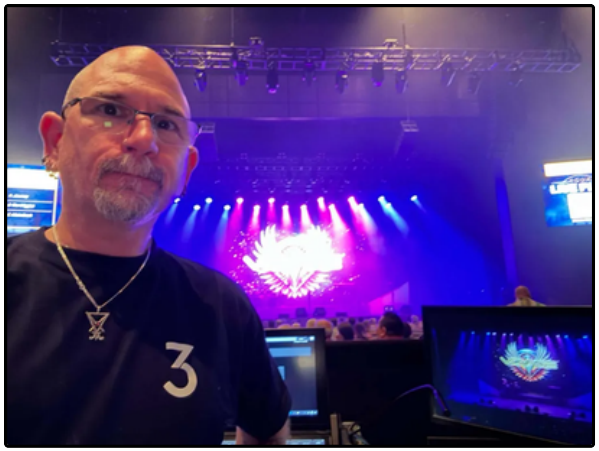
An Exclusive Interview With DEAN MARINO

Interview with JT Mouradian
A Nashville Artist's Take on Skinny Dennis
and MORE!

Issue #4

JT Mouradian: Behind the Lights of the Music Industry



Written By Lucas Coursey

(Photo Provided by JT Mouradian)

One of the biggest things that gets overlooked at a concert is the lighting. But when done right, it can be one of the most memorable parts of the show. JT Mouradian is currently the lighting director for Voyage, a Journey tribute band. How did he get to where he is now?

JT has been around music all his life. His father, Jim Mouradian, was a bassist for the band Ronnie Earl and the Broadcasters and owned a guitar shop called Mouradian Guitar Co. Originally, JT wasn't planning on going into the music industry. The turning point came when one of his dad's friends came into the guitar shop and offered JT a job as his guitar tech for a show in Boston. JT had never been a tech before and didn't know what to do, but he wasn't going to let that stop him. After that first show, he continued working as the guitarist's tech, sneaking into clubs and bars at the ripe age of 18 just to do his job. Although sketchy, he found it exhilarating.

After about two years, one of his friends, Pat Badger, offered him the opportunity to become a roadie for his band, Extreme. This was another major turning point in JT's career. As JT gained experience, so did the band. They started touring across the country and eventually went on a world tour. During this time, he also got to work with bands like Alice in Chains, Winger, Cinderella, David Lee Roth, and ZZ Top. One of his favorite memories from touring was working at the Freddie Mercury Tribute Concert at Wembley Stadium. The love and genuine emotion he experienced throughout the event still hold a special place in his heart.

After some internal difficulties within the band, Extreme decided to take a break. During that time, JT went on tour with another band called Saigon Kick, continuing to work as a roadie. After their first arena show in Indonesia, JT thought the lighting production was really bad, so he offered to run it the next night. He had never run lights before, but he was determined to do better than the last guy. Doing this job combined his two loves: music and technology. Although he didn't know what he was doing at first, he was determined to-

-learn. He didn't want to put in the bare minimum; he was determined to put his heart and soul into it.

As JT continued working with Saigon Kick, he also began taking on more lighting jobs at local clubs and bars. Each show gave him more experience and helped him improve his skills. What started as an opportunity to fix someone else's lighting production was quickly turning into a career of its own. As JT put it, "The whole reason I got the job instead of someone else is that I'm just fun to be around. As long as you're nice to people, they're gonna want you around." His words show how much being easy to work with and building good relationships can matter in the music industry.

After stepping away from the lighting industry for two decades to focus on supporting his family, in 2017, his old friend Pat Badger called him with an opportunity to return to music. The band wanted to do a reunion tour, and that was the call that brought JT back into the music industry. This time, though, music was more of a hobby than a full-time job, with shows happening every other weekend or so. He quickly realized how much lighting technology had changed over the decades, but this only fueled his passion more.

As he got used to the new technology, one of his friends let him borrow a lighting rig. This helped him learn how to create entire shows instead of relying on the presets already available at a venue. He continued developing his skills and learning how to build lighting productions of his own. Today, he tours with Voyage and helps other bands whenever they ask, continuing to pursue the passion he discovered years ago. When asked what advice he would give to someone trying to get into the music industry, JT emphasized the importance of building genuine connections with people. As he put it, “Just be nice to people. Get to know them. The deeper the connection, the better. The more you talk to people, like genuinely talk, the more they’ll want to bring you back. But most of all, just do what you love.”

Nick Lawrence on Nashville's New Safe Haven for Traditional Country Music

Written By Brady Reed



(Photo Provided By Nick Lawrence)

Nashville is known for its abundance of live country music, especially when it comes to the streets of downtown. It is much too common to hear the music of popular artists like Morgan Wallen, Carrie Underwood, and Luke Combs while exploring areas like Broadway on any given afternoon or night. While this sound dominates our city, where can people find the music that laid the foundation for what country music is now? It is rare to hear the music of influential artists like Ray Price, Hank Williams Sr., and Ernest Tubb in most of Nashville's most popular areas for live music. Fortunately, there is one place that is giving a new home for these cornerstones of country music: Skinny Dennis. I sat down with local guitarist Nick Lawrence to discuss this new spot where traditional country can flourish.

Nick first moved to Nashville in 2024 after years of prepping himself to play music in the area, and despite the fact that Skinny Dennis only opened a few months after in 2025, it became immediately clear to him and the musicians he played with that it was going to re-arrange the country music landscape in the area. Since then, according to Nick, it has become "the ideal when it comes to a...live music club;" a place where true appreciators of music can come hang out, dance, and listen to something completely different from most areas in Nashville.

To Nick, what might be the most important aspect of Skinny Dennis is its separateness from the influence of modern, "Top 40" country trends. When asked if any of the music played at Skinny Dennis changes based on what is happening in the modern country scene, Nick gave a short and simple answer: "No." The music played at Skinny Dennis revolves around-

-traditional country that has been long-forgotten by many country fans, along with other lesser recognized subgenres of country like western swing and country jazz. For Nick, it is an "incredibly special thing" that Skinny Dennis has been able to provide a space for this music to thrive.

Additionally, outside of the traditional listening experience, Skinny Dennis has become a new home base for musicians who have a deep love for traditional country music. Prior to Skinny Dennis' opening, there were few places that provided Nashville musicians with a regular opportunity to play traditional country, with Robert's Western World on Broadway being the most prominent of all of them. Now, since it has opened, Skinny Dennis has provided a place for these musicians to hang out, play together, and learn from one another. For a long time for Nick, this came in the form of a regular Tuesday night gig with fellow musicians Jeremy Long, Elijah Ocean, Joshua Hedley, Tyler Hall, Silas Hamilton, and Sam Brown. Furthermore, it has provided a point of entry for newly-arrived musicians in the area who are stewards of the country music tradition where they can develop their skills with the help of professionals who are guaranteed to have the same passion as them.

Overall, according to Nick, Skinny Dennis "will be a historic place" in the Nashville music scene as time goes on. Its appreciation and abundance of traditional and lesser-known country music has provided a breath of fresh air in the Nashville music scene where lovers of the music can celebrate it, and newcomers can become aware of it. For Nick, it is a deep and powerful thing that people still make music that has been around for so long and that there is now a place that acts as a home for it. Skinny Dennis has provided Nashville with a unique opportunity to participate in a long, uniquely American tradition that helped build the area into what it is today.

You can catch Nick every Tuesday night (along with various other days) at Skinny Dennis. Additionally, you can find any other gigs that Nick is playing on Instagram at @pickinnicklawrence. To find out about future shows at Skinny Dennis, including regular performances from artists like Jim Lauderdale and Wild Bill & The Bruisers, you can check them out on their website, skinnydennisnashville.com, or on Instagram at skinnydennis_nash.

Band Showcase: Dean Marino and The Mob

Written By: Ari Andelman
Photos Provided By: Dean Marino and the Mob



If you ever see a performer who emulates the electric energy of Elton John and is dancing and singing his heart out on stage, it's probably Dean Marino. I had the pleasure of sitting down with Dean Marino and his band, The Mob, recently before their show at Live Oak on 10/26 to talk about how the band was formed, what excites them the most about entertaining, and what their fans can look forward to. Dean Marino is from Sugar Land, Texas, and credits his parents for making music a big part of his life from the start. His dad is a songwriter, singer, performer, and producer, and his eclectic skill set inspired Dean and his work ethic. Dean started producing a lot earlier than his peers, releasing his first album in-

2017 (you can find his entire discography on his Bandcamp site). He sees the music industry's reputation for cutthroat-competition as a bit exaggerated because of the many "hats" an artist can wear, such as producing, arranging, songwriting, or artist management.

The Mob started as a trio during Dean's Freshman year and included Brenden St. Mary (drums) and Carter Ferris (bass), with Dean as the pianist and vocalist. He played a few gigs with this setup, but his goal was to get a fuller sound with-

synths and a horn section to elevate his music to a larger scale. Dean applied to Belmont's Pop Showcase in the fall of sophomore-year, forming a band to help him with the audition. Long story short, he made the show and decided to keep the band permanent based on shared passion, chemistry, and similar goals. This was the official start of the Mob. The Mob is currently constructed as follows: Brenden on Drums, Danny on Bass, Dr. Phil on Keys, Henri on Guitar, Rayo on trumpet, Adam on Trombone, and Sugar Shane on Sax. Each-

-member brings their own charisma and pizzazz to the stage. I pulled aside Dr. Phil and Henri to talk about their mindset during rehearsal and before live shows. They shared that rehearsal is a safe space where they all understand that they are living busy lives and have personal issues, but they know they can always leave those at the door to produce the best product possible. In rehearsals, they focus on variety in arrangements, crowd engagement, and even choreography!

The band performs Dean Marino's original music with some covers mixed in, such as Steely Dan and Bruno Mars. They take inspiration from Billy Joel, Prince, James Brown, and Michael Jackson. Dean described his music as "sprawling" and "prolific." What sets them apart from other bands is the fact that they bring-

-a unique fusion of pop, funk, and soul to the country music capital of the world. There aren't a lot of other bands you can compare them to. The visual flair that they bring, and how they make every audience member feel like they are part of the performance, is a big aspect that pulls them away from the typical acts of Broadway.

Regarding projects, Dean recently released *DEANFM*, an album that features The Mob but is primarily a solo album. he next project, releasing very soon, is the *Mob Ties* EP, which-

-features full band versions of the three songs the group performed at Pop Showcase. Beyond sustainability and recognition, Dean "wants to make the world a happier place through music." You can feel the energy in the venues when he performs, and he makes it feel like you're a part of something special when he interacts with audience members. To keep up with their activities, follow @realdean-marino_music on all social media platforms, and if you like what you read, come to his next show on November 14th at the Cobra!