







Heavy metal band Blacktop Mojo shreds downtown

There's nothing like kicking off the weekend by doing something you love and for me it's ending the work week by losing myself in music. Depending on my mood, whatever the genre, music does it for me. Experiencing new music is always a plus, too. That opportunity presented itself as I and some friends got the chance to check out a new band called Blacktop Mojo.

Blacktop Mojo consists of Matt James-vocals, Nathan Gillis-drums, Ryan Kiefer-lead guitar, Chuck Wepfer-rhythm guitar, and Matt Curtis-bass.

Starting out in late 2012 in a small town called Palestine, Tex., the band was formed by front man James and drummer Gillis. Their debut album *"I Am"* came out in 2014, followed by their second album " *Burn The* Ships" in 2017. Their third album " *Under The Sun* " released in 2019, is catapulting the band to the top. The band rocked out downtown Jan. 31, at Juggernaut Music with two local bands, War Motor and Faceless. I was privileged to catch up with them for an interview as they were doing their soundcheck.

Sun: Matt, thank you so much for taking the time to do this, I really appreciate it, man. You know I was checking out your album in my ride and coming in now, you guys sound as if I was still listening in my car. You guys definitely have a unique sound, you guys sound so tight.

BT: Oh man you going to give me a big head (laughing), I appreciate you talking to us. We're pretty raw type of laid back, we don't have any gimmicks. It's just us playing our instruments on stage and we like to do the same thing in the studio. It's fun playing music for a living. How can you not have fun? Whether it's ten people or ten thousand, it's all the same to us.

Sun: Now right off the bat, Blacktop Mojo, the name.

BT: Okay, so the name came from a small town in East Texas where we grew up, called Palestine. We'd do this thing called "back roading *"* where we would sneak off and get some beer or whiskey and listen to some music while we hit the back roads. We were trying to come up with a name for our band and one of the guys said "Blacktop Mojo." The name sort of stuck and that's how we came up with the name.

Sun: Oh, way cool. Now let's talk about your music. When I heard you guys were from Texas, I kind of thought you would have some sort of southern sound, perhaps some influences from ZZ Top, Lynyrd Skynyrd, along those lines. Instead it's straight awesome rock with a flavor of the blues.

BT: I think it's a bit of everything man, my parents raised me on Van Halen, AC/DC. My mom listened to a lot of hair metal. When I moved to East Texas I started listening to country since that's all that came on the radio (laughing). The rest of the guys listened to '90's grunge music like Soundgarden, Alice In Chains, and Tool. So, we had a lot of influences.

Sun: Cool. Now let's talk about your latest album *Under The Sun*. The album has some aggressive ballads, strong guitar riffs, and intros that just catch you from the beginning and keep ahold of you to the very end. The lead off single
Can't Sleep
is way cool. It's apparent you guys put a lot of work into it.

BT: Thank you, thank you. Ya we all put a lot of time and everything into this album. We get into a room and most of the time it will start with one guy's idea, maybe a guitar riff, vocal line, or maybe a drum beat and try to work it all together. Each of the guys had their input into it and we try to utilize all that and see what we can do with it.

Sun: Let's talk about some of your crazy videos like *Come Get Your Coat*.

BT: (Laughing) If you ever had a one-night stand and you can't quite get your bearings the next day, and I felt like we could go with a circus theme. We had a friend of a friend who had a monkey and we all had fun filming that video. How we dress in the other videos is pretty much how we dress coming from a small town in Texas.

Sun: Here's a question for you Matt. Now if you weren't doing this, what would you be doing, besides cruising the back roads (laughing)?

I went to college to become a doctor and graduated after four years, and I thought school's not for me. So I took a break and sort of stumbled into it, meeting our drummer and here we are.

Sun: What was your degree in?

BT: Biomedical Science, it sounds impressive (laughing), fancy biology degree.

Sun: Dang, kudos to you dude. You know I hear it a lot that metal is so underrated, that the artists are just headbanging people with no ambitions. They just don't get up there and sing, they have a lot of brains.

BT: Oh yeah, there's a lot of depth to heavy metal music and not just a lot of screaming.

Sun: Right on brother. Hey Matt, I want to thank you for hanging out and doing this, and cruising to Gallup to rock this area. Guaranteed we rockers totally appreciate it. Where can people go and get ahold of all your albums?

BT: Oh, thank you for doing this and we appreciate everyone who comes and checks us out brother. They can visit our site *blacktopmojo.com* and grab all the albums there and check out the videos as well.

By Dee Velasco
For the Sun