

# WILLY PORTER

Searching for the shaman that lives inside the guitar has led Willy Porter on a musical and personal odyssey spanning over two decades, 10 albums, and multiple continents. His journey remains defined by an independent drive to evolve as a musician and human, affording him the freedom to create the next song on his own terms. Equally accomplished as a guitarist, singer, and songwriter, Porter's songs weave a universal perspective about the questions, struggles, and triumphs of human existence. His live shows are guitar-driven events—equal parts grit, soul, and muscle—that are electrifying, dynamic, and wholly original in the way that Porter's voice blends and fuses with his virtuoso fret work.

A largely self-taught musician, Porter began treating audiences to his brand of guitar playing and wry storytelling in the late '80's while living in Madison, Wisconsin. In 1990, he released his first full-length independent album, *The Trees Have Soul*, and the touring life has flowed steadily ever since. Porter has literally logged millions of miles across America, Canada, the UK, and Europe, touring solo, as well as with various incarnations of the Willy Porter Band and in support of artists like Tori Amos, Paul Simon, Jethro Tull, Sting, and Jeff Beck.

Porter's breakthrough album, *Dog Eared Dream*, was released in 1994, and the song "Angry Words" quickly became a staple at the burgeoning AAA radio format. This led to a major label deal with BMG/Private Music in 1995. Unfortunately, Private was dismantled by BMG just as Porter was preparing to release his follow-up. With contractual freedom in 1998, Porter quickly signed with the San Francisco-based label Six Degrees. There he released three albums beginning with the studio gem, *Falling Forward* (1999), produced by multiple Grammy-winner Neil Dorfsman (Dire Straits, Sting). The eponymous *Willy Porter* (2001) followed featuring great guest performances by Ian Anderson from Jethro Tull and Tony Levin. His fan-favorite solo disc, *High Wire Live* (2003) was co-produced with Grammy-winner Ben Wisch (Marc Cohn, Shawn Colvin).

In 2005 Porter left Six Degrees and launched his own imprint, Weasel Records. Together with longtime keyboardist/collaborator Dave Adler, Porter produced the atmospheric album *Available Light* in 2006. His work with Guild & Fender guitars over the next several years would result in the manufacture of the "Willy Porter Signature" acoustic guitar. Porter then took time to record and produce singer/songwriter Natalia Zukerman, on her whip-smart Weasel debut, *Brand New Frame* (2008). Porter released his next disc, *How to Rob a Bank* in 2009, the heavily Americana-flavored record featuring the contributions of the LA-based quartet, Raining Jane. *Bank* was followed with a live disc recorded with the Carpe Diem String Quartet in (2010). This collaboration produced a gorgeous EP featuring several of Porter's most enduring tunes ("Breathe," "Paper Airplane," "Watercolor"), elevated and reinterpreted against a backdrop of lush string arrangements. In 2011, Porter produced the second Weasel release for Natalia Zukerman, the driving *Gas Station Roses*. A partnership with Milwaukee-based singer/ songwriter Carmen Nickerson resulted in the album, *Cheeseburgers and Gasoline* (2013). This spartan production illuminates themes of life-longing and relationship repair, all while balancing the dream of self-actualization on the axle of a carnival's Tilt-a-Whirl. The record also includes Porter's brilliant cover arrangement of Peter Gabriel's "Digging in the Dirt."

On his latest disc, *Human Kindness* (2015), Porter brings all of his acoustic, electric, and multi-string chops to bear in service of a great collection of songs. This album is a driving, tuneful return to the pop sensibilities of his best work that also showcases Porter's growth as a writer, musician, and producer.

In addition to making a life in music, Porter finds ways to make an impact on local and international levels. He is an active supporter of Advocates of Ozaukee, a shelter and treatment facility for victims of domestic violence and abuse in Mequon, Wisconsin. His annual benefit concerts have raised more than \$90,000 for this organization to date. Porter also gives his time and talents to helping behind the scenes at First Stage, a world-class Milwaukee-based children's theatre company. His recent involvement with Kids4Peace International works to bring kids from Palestine, Israel, and the Middle East together with American kids to work towards a dialogue of mutual respect, tolerance, and understanding in hopes that the next generation will have leadership comprised of strong, peaceful voices.

Willy Porter lives in Milwaukee, Wisconsin with his wife, two children, and their Beagle/ Terrier, Charlie.

