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MUSIC

Corn Stars: The Hickoids Celebrate 40 Years Of Rocking



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The Hickoids celebrate their 40th anniversary on Wednesday, May 29 at Under The Volcano. Credit: Photo by Richard Tomcala

It's been 40 years since cowpunk heroes the **Hickoids** played their first promoted show in band leader Jeff Smith's hometown in San Antonio sharing the stage with none other than Black Flag and The Meat Puppets.

"I was actually the promoter and I don't remember a hell of a lot about it," laughs Smith adding, "It seemed to go over pretty well."

To celebrate the milestone, the Hickoids have been on tour making a stop at **Under The Volcano** on Wednesday, May 29 with special guest Sister Rayban, the side project of The Guillotines frontman Bill

DeGidio.

For the Houston show, the band will perform their 1987 debut album *We're In It For The Corn* in its entirety along with other fan favorites from their large catalog of songs.





"Our original concept was to match up hardcore punk with hardcore country. Blag Flag meets Gary Stewart." explains Smith who founded the band with guitarist John Thomas Jackson, better known as Jukebox, who passed away in 2013.

"I was the kid in the band on the first album," says Smith, who is the only surviving original member as Davy Jones also passed away in 2015 after a battle with cancer.

Jones actually named the band after Jukebox and Smith were at his apartment scoring some pot and Jones saw a cowboy hat donning hobo going through the garbage referring to him as a "Hickoid son of a bitch" and the name stuck immediately.

"All those guys were about ten years older than me but I'm happy to be alive and still be able to get out and play with an excellent bunch of guys. It's been a very consistent line up for the past ten years since Davy Jones became ill so we carry the tradition forward plus."

The line up has remained very consistent and the band has preserved their punk rock edge and ability to melt genres and faces with Harvey McLaughlin on keyboards, Tom Trusnovic on bass, guitarist Cody Richardson and Lance Farley on drums.

We're In It For The Corn plays fast and hard and really shows the aggressive boom the band used to break onto the scene four decades ago. Recorded by now famed producer and engineer **Stuart Sullivan**, and his first recording project, Smith admits their debut album stands out from the rest.

"I think that going through the mixing process we all got kind of ran over by Jukebox and it could have been a better balance to the mix but I will say, we didn't sound like anybody else out there."

To this day it would be hard to find a band who does what the Hickoids do. Corn joke filled rock stars who command the stage and take no prisoners as Smith paces, slowly losing layers of clothing and building the tension between the band and the audience with humor and aggression creating a mix of fear, arousal and curiosity.

"Thank you, that is the desired outcome. I consider that a great complement," says Smith of the description. "We're primarily a live band really and I want everybody who comes and sees us to leave feeling like they saw something special. For me, it's important to carry on the tradition with the guys I played with who are not alive anymore and to keep it relevant in the moment for myself but those guys are never far from my thoughts when it comes to the band because it's a continuum."

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A lot can happen in 40 years, and a lot did happen with the Hickoids. The band, staples in the Austin cowpunk scene, toured and recorded heavily throughout the '80s stepping slightly away from the harder sound of their debut album to funnier, cheeky songs incorporating the many sounds of Texas from country to conjunto.





“I wouldn’t say that we’ve ever had one sound and that’s probably been to our detriment. I think that the first album I would describe it as experimental hardcore meets country but there’s elements of psychedelia and glam in there and also a helping of goofiness and we kind of continued that theme.”

The Hickoids disbanded in the early ‘90s and when Smith and Jones got back together in 2006, their wild partying ways of the past were no longer but they decided to try again, this time with sobriety, a new concept to Smith at that time.

“It was difficult because we were both sober, I was newly sober and he had been sober about fifteen years at that time. We wanted to do what we had done before but do it better and be more consistent because we were not reliable and we were not being all we could be so to that end, I think we surpassed version one in some ways.”

Smith has been working on a release to honor his departed comrade with *The Davy Jones Bootlegs*, a three disc vinyl collection of Jones work with the Hickoids and other bands and an accompanying book on his life.

Smith admits he has taken his time with the project due to wanting to do Jones justice as well as his split commitment with his San Antonio Corn Pound including his **Saustex Records**, Jett Bass Studios, named after his brother and Krayolas member, **Flagship Records**, rehearsal spaces and more.

Smith is also expecting to release the next Hickoids album *More Ballads For Sleazy Riders* soon and fans can expect some upcoming singles and tracks to be featured at the live shows.

Houston has historically been an important city for the band in their long career and Smith recalls playing here many, many times throughout the years. It was only natural for the band to include a special performance of their debut album, something they've only done in Smith's hometown of San Antonio.

"Houston has always been an important anchor to us coming in and we appreciated our friends there that still support us and we try to always bring it for them," says Smith who also shouts out the love and support they've gotten from Pete Mitchell, owner of Under The Volcano.

When asked if he ever imagined that day he was buying a bag with Jukebox that the Hickoids in all their untamed splendor would last this long he quickly says, "Absolutely not."

"When I was 15, I never thought what it would be like to be 20 and when I was 20, I never thought what it would be like to be 25. I'm just happy to be here and to have survived the folly and nonchalance of my youth."

The Hickoids will perform with Sister Rayban on Wednesday, May 29 at Under The Volcano, 2349 Bissonnet, doors at 7, $15.

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