**Joshua Speers Bio**By: Eve Barlow

Summer, 2019. Los Angeles. I'm a local music journalist moving apartments and need to re-paint my room white before vacating. I am a writer, not a painter, and so the task overwhelms me. I don't know the first place to start. In a panic I call a friend and she says: “Who do you know who is the quintessential All-American hero who absolutely not only surely knows how to paint a room, but would probably love to paint a room?” I know immediately that she's talking about Joshua Speers. Speers I was aware of as a blue-collar rock songwriter, as a motorcyclist, as a lover of baseball, as someone who was extremely well read.

On paper he sounds made up, like Dean Moriarty – Kerouac's poster boy in *On The Road*. One of four brothers, Speers is a child of ministers and wise men; a troubadour who spent half his young life in cars, and has slept in almost every rest stop on the New Jersey Turnpike in his own vehicle because he felt at home there; a poetry major who also played in jam bands and put on tours just because he didn't know any better; a workman who has been a pottery apprentice, a carpenter, a busboy, an assistant to a governor, a nanny, a baseball coach; a hopeless romantic who looks like a walking black-and-white Herb Ritts portrait.

Speers knows how to plaster a ceiling. He once delivered a boat from Maine to Maryland. His own James Dean broodiness and Huckleberry Finn boyishness would be cheesy if it wasn't so damn poetic. He isn't just good with his hands, he's a thinker and a philosopher. In his company, he'll pull out at a couple of quotes. They are never annoying and actually *do* make you think. Maybe some Churchill, probably some Joan Didion, potentially some Duke Ellington. “I don't use songs to work through what I'm going through,” he says, at one point. “George Mallory who climbed Everest was asked: “Why did you do it?” He said: “Because it's there.” Actually that might have been Edmund Hilary. I don't know why I write songs.” There's a tattoo of John Coltrane on his right bicep and one of Thelonius Monk on his ribcage. He wanted to study jazz history when he attended Skidmore for English Literature, but he wound up getting into Poetry and Pottery. Maybe he still will study jazz one day.

Anyway, circling back to my emergency. Speers jumped at the invitation to paint my room. We met at Home Depot. As we walked the aisles gathering things we needed he effused about the times he'd come to Home Depot and fill up a shopping cart only to have to return half the items he couldn't yet afford. Where most budding rock stars would dream of a big house and a nice car, Speers dreams of being able to go ham in Home Depot. We ride in his car back to my apartment with our tools. On his dashboard I notice a library of books stacked, like a miniature bookshelf. In his trunk are boxes of pottery he's been making all season. There are tools he's been using for his motorcycle apprenticeship (he was fixing up a Honda). When we get started on the job, Speers takes a simple wall-painting exercise and makes it look like a dance. It's not just the way he paints a room, it's the way he talks about the paint, and describes the brushes, and the way it smells, and shines, and also reminds him of so many vivid memories that he recounts like well-rehearsed spoken prose.

He's incredibly nostalgic is Speers; the type of guy who would pull his heart from his chest and put it in your hands for safekeeping, and yet still there's an air of mystique about him. Somehow, despite all his worldliness and stories, he is also ageless. He could be 15 or 35-years-old. You wouldn't trust either answer. “It's a hard task making a white kid from Delaware sound interesting,” he laughs. You realize his biggest life commitment he's made has been to destroy the very preconception.

Speers moved out to Los Angeles in October 2018 to take a real shot at a music career, but his soul belongs on the East Coast forever. From Boston to New Hampshire to Vermont to Western Massachusetts, he has cousins, brothers, grandparents, friends… places to drive and people to drive to. He grew up in the backseats of cars with his brothers being passed off between parents and grandparents around those places after his parents' divorce. In a way, the car became his home with all his essentials in it. He describes it as looking like a desk. Inside, he has water colors, pencils, stationary for writing letters, journals and the books that he's reading. He gets the best sleep in the front passenger seat. “In college I had my grandparents' Subaru and in the back I had my rock climbing equipment, my fly-fishing equipment, pottery stuff, a tool belt, carpentry tools… I love that feeling of being able to go wherever I want. We were so beholden to my parents as kids. When my brothers and I got our license we could just go anywhere,” he says.

When he was younger and in bands, Speers would shoot from the hip, book shows in places like Richmond not knowing anyone there, pretending he was a manager, and then showing up, sometimes to nobody. “We got a satisfaction from it. We didn't know any better,” he laughs. “We didn't know that there was a professional way. We felt like we had to steal it.” For a while music did feel like stealing for Speers, because it wasn't pragmatic. He loved music. It was his thing, his rebellion among a literary family. His hobby that he blew all his money on whenever he had any.

In a beautiful Delaware boarding school his dad was the principal, and he and his brothers were the faculty brats. “It was like this Norman Rockwell painting of a childhood,” he says. He was a tearaway, a troublemaker, an instigator, but as his friends began to get expelled, Speers wanted to turn things around. He got rid of the chip on his shoulder, became excited about school, about books. “I was the kid pumped for Pride & Prejudice in sophomore year, like it was the Avengers.” He'd go to the music room with a bass, printed off tabs from the library and his band and learn AC/DC, Led Zeppelin, and Beatles songs. The day he learned 'Money' by Pink Floyd he knew he was onto something. The band were called Jamchylde (“Rock and roll!” he laughs). They made two albums themselves to learn how they could do it. They played in contests. But he never considered musicianship as a serious path. His background was scholarly and practical. His dad's lineage was all ministers; as religious about literature as they were scripture.

Speers didn't learn to sing until the year between High School and college. He moved across the country in his car with his best friend to Boulder, Colorado. They were street performers. He had to learn how to project in order to catch people's attention. It was workmanlike. “Even now when someone compliments my voice, I think they're pulling my leg,” he says. “I had a very manual labor approach to singing.” It's still a new tool for him. “I had always written songs quietly in my bedroom not wanting to wake anyone up. I didn't know what my range was. Now I've discovered where my sweet spot is.”

It wasn't until he relocated here, that he began to appreciate all these pieces of the story of his life. On the more efficient East Coast, living hand-to-mouth, pillar-to-post is not something to talk about. It's just what's done. Something else shifted in LA. It's best explained when he talks about his pottery. “It's this immediate form of expression where the clay moves where you want it to. I love functional work. I love the feeling of giving someone something that you made, it's so primal and direct. Here's something you need for sustenance that's been created.” He understood that just as pottery could be this closed loop service so could music on an emotional scale.

His previous jobs inform his emotional efforts in music. They mean he treats art like a job. He wakes up early to prepare for sessions like he would any academic class. “Whether it's anxiety or motivation - gotta get to work, gotta get ready for class,” he says. “It's time to go for it. It's time to push.” He did the “LA handshake” when he moved here, before signing to a label. He worked sessions and wound up finding kindred spirits in the likes of songwriter Tommy English (Kacey Musgraves) and producer Lars Stalfors (St. Vincent, Cold War Kids) because they wanted to learn as much as he did. He wrote songs that felt more like himself than ever before. Initially he wrote them like he was making a new coat to wear, but once he heard them back, he realized that he already had the coat.

“I was being surprised by my reflection,” he explains. “As the songs started to take shape, they were becoming even more true. The novel unfolds as you're writing it. These songs feel like I've peeled off this exoskeleton and that's what's walking around. It's like the feeling when you wake up in your bedroom after you've moved the furniture around and you instantly think – where am I? This is all my stuff, it's all familiar, but there's a different physical experience to it. They *feel* like me.” Years of preparation have met a modicum of luck, and now it's Speers' time to go somewhere new.

Speers explains that while he was in LA, missing the East Coast, experiencing a breakup, the task of being more honest than ever about his experiences was his reason to follow the star. It forced him to see himself in his least comfortable form. The result is his first major label EP, titled *Human Now*, a reference to a WH Auden poem.

It begins with the epic song “Bad Night” and continues with the synth-y ode to solitude “Happy Birthday You're Alone.” It comes from a place of brokenness following cutting heartache. It's his immediate thoughts. “It's what I have an emotional doorway into,” he explains. “Can I Fall In Love With A Broken Heart” isn't just a song title but a very literal question he was trying to answer; an ode to being in the throws of a freshly ended relationship. “Oh Brother” is a self-aware reckoning about doomed romance. “Stray Bullets” is a tongue-in-cheek meditation on breaking free from our overstimulated world. The songs are inspired by essayist Didion whose main writing goal was always to incorporate honesty, to describe *“how it felt to be me*.”

Indeed, the EP is what it felt like to be Speers this past year. It's an all-American ride, full of driving '80s guitar riffs, steady drums and perfectly described by Speers himself as the lovechild of Bruce Springsteen and Carly Rae Jepsen. “Those are my musical parents,” he jokes. “They've been incredibly good to me and provided a very loving supportive household to grow up in.”

Speers is an emblem of risky transitions. He is what it looks like to follow your gut. His story is about how to survive being far away from home. The yearning that comes from that is what you hear in his everyman music. That's why he's your hero. “I'm not more talented than anyone else, I'm not a better singer or guitar player, but I think I have more of a stomach to put myself into places where I'm not comfortable. I always think of myself as a scaredy cat.” Speers hasn't always been the good guy, but he's an absolute delight now. He's as much a Peter Pan as he is a grown man with a sense of responsibility. He's Joshua Speers: the guy you call.