

The Daily Targum

INSIDE BEAT

David W. Jacobsen's 'POTUS' combines rock 'n roll with clever political commentary

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Photo by Davidwj.com

Rutgers alumnus David W. Jacobsen takes a comedic spin on rock n' roll with sharp-witted political commentary on his new album "POTUS."

As if we couldn't have any more parodies of failed, gossip-worthy presidencies, indie artist and Rutgers University alumnus David W. Jacobsen offers a fresh recount of notable U.S presidents on his comedy-rock album "POTUS."

Coming off from four years of disorder and frenzied White House affairs, "POTUS" fits thematically with the times we're in. It's a clever, amusing exploration of the psyches of problematic leaders and their internal affairs.

Almost all the songs on the album are first person narratives, sung from the president's perspective. Jacobsen taps into the woes and bitter cries of former presidents Herbert Hoover, Gerald Ford, Richard Nixon, William Howard Taft, John Adams and Andrew Johnson with expertise, but not without a crash course on their tenures.

The project initially intended to be a joke with a song about former President Rutherford B. Hayes, a parody of Jimi Hendrix's "Purple Haze." But, Jacobsen was inspired to delve further in his research, reading books and watching lectures about monstrous or written-off American presidents. "POTUS" wasn't a deliberate project, but rather one that gradually came into fruition.

"When I wrote the Nixon song I thought yeah I'd definitely release this but I didn't know it would be on a collection just about presidents ... Once I got to five or six songs, I thought 'Now I need enough of these to make it its own thing' ... It started becoming a fulfilling process."

In Nixon's parable, "Effective at Noon Tomorrow," Jacobsen sings in a bitter and resigned manner as Nixon steps down as president after the infamous Watergate scandal. The song, which was written before former President Donald J. Trump was elected, highlights the contrast between Nixon's acquiescence and Trump's staunch refusal to step down from office.

But, the album isn't exclusively about major political events. Some of them, at their core, are about complex human relationships.

"A lot of these songs you can listen to and not have any idea that they have anything to do with American history. The Taft song sounds like a jilted love song or ... two friends falling out. It just so happens that the two friends are William Howard Taft and Theodore Roosevelt," Jacobsen said.

The song in question, "Crying at Your Grave," is a standout on the album. The juxtaposition of the upbeat melody and melancholy lyrics furnishes the underlying humor present throughout the album. In the number, Taft laments his falling out with the recently late Roosevelt, [singing](#) "It pains me that we've parted / Cherished memories I'll save / Though I must now oppose you / I'll be crying at your grave."

Jacobsen's goal on this project was to humanize these figures — even if it entailed sharing a horrifying perspective — and he did just that. Reviving the voices of long gone leaders, he adopts a musical theater approach akin to that of "Hamilton" that makes the plotline of a villain entertaining.

He turns Ford's whiny commentary on granting Nixon a pardon into a disco song, effectively capturing his indignation about standing in Nixon's aftermath. In the number, Jacobsen as Ford proclaims his generosity was circumstantial and more about his will to move on.

"1799" joins "Samuel Tilden's Lament" as a parody of an existing song, playing on the use of the word "party" as a verb. It revisits the early days of the country's existence with the Adams and Jeffersons. Adams sings to Alexander Hamilton after he sabotaged his chances of getting reelected by releasing a harsh, critical letter about him.

"People sabotaging their own party over personal pettiness and gripes is pretty old," Jacobsen said.

According to Jacobsen, ego is a major theme that runs through the album, complicating presidential affairs and relationships. Many of the presidents's despairs surround their battered reputation or resentment towards a friend turned enemy. As Jacobsen worked on "POTUS" during Trump's term, he found that Trump managed to surpass even the worst of presidents.

But, despite the parallels one can draw between contemporary leaders and their predecessors, Jacobsen views the album as a form of musical and historical exploration.

"I care about appealing to people across political lines but I didn't want it to be a real modern political commentary. It's supposed to be more of a history project," he said before slyly revealing that he has an extended play based on Trump saved in his files.

As for future projects within the same subject matter, Jacobsen says he might move on to British monarchs, claiming they're more dramatic.

You can check out "POTUS" [here](#).