

# James Cohen

## and the Prairie Roots Rockers

Rock and roll never lets you go and James Cohen is living proof of that.

But this Winnipeg singer, songwriter and guitar player isn't your typical rock and roller.

James Cohen must be the only recording artist running a public company that is currently trading on the Toronto Stock Exchange, and quite successfully at that.

Cohen is a man who inherited his mother's artistry and his father's business sense, and to his credit he's found a way to balance one with the other, never letting his musical efforts take a back seat to his professional business career.

So here comes James Cohen, suit off, jeans on, with his fifth album, a self-titled effort, on Edmonton-based label, SoccerMom Records.

Simply titled James Cohen and the Prairie Roots Rockers, this gritty, part melodic part groove driven twelve-song set, was created by an artist who has a few years of experience under his belt. Cohen is an artist who has learned just as much from the knocks and tribulations in life as he has from the successes and triumphs.

"I think one of the recurring themes in this set of songs is the passage of time. I am blessed with a very good memory and I can reflect on another year or time and remember things I was doing at a certain time of year and bring those moments back to life.

"This was also a batch of songs that I wrote over a three year period and I kept them to myself. I had a gut feeling that I had some good material but I didn't share it with anyone until I demoed three of them with Lloyd," says Cohen, referring to producer Lloyd Peterson who has worked with Cohen in the past, as well as Los Lobos and Winnipeg faves Nathan.

Once those demos made their way to Cohen's friends, associates and peers, the positive response confirmed it was time for Cohen to head back into the studio and cut a new album.

Reflecting on the album sessions, Cohen couldn't have been more pleased with the input from band members, and Cohen describes the arranging process, "as one that was very democratic."

"It's a guitar driven record, some of them are chiming in and other have this chunky muscular sound."

The content of much of Cohen's material is very personal, and insight on a song such as Unnamed Child is balanced with the observation of changing times, the catalyst for the song One By One.

"I think Unnamed Child is a nice story and I can tell you that I wrote it on July 28, 2009. It is about my sister who I am very close to and she lives in New York. She had been trying to have a baby and got pregnant and a lot was going on with her pregnancy. Here I am all these miles away waiting for periodic updates from our mom and we're all praying for a healthy baby. So I imagined singing this song to her. Everything turned out fine by the way, the baby and the song" says Cohen, who is busy

rehearsing this material with the Prairie Roots Rockers for upcoming shows.

The emotional attachment found in *One By One* may not be as deep as that of *Unnamed Child*, but like so many of us, Cohen can't help but notice, and be affected to some degree, by the drastic changes in our urban centres.

"*One By One* is a story about Winnipeg but it is a universal story, it transfers pretty easily. The inspiration for the song came when I started noticing that a lot of the places I used to hang out at were gone. Coffee shops, the old Eaton's building. Those places would evoke memories of the past and they just disappear, especially in North America. We're a little luckier here in Winnipeg as the Exchange neighborhood has so much history. Even so I am struck by how many landmarks, that form a large part of my childhood memories, have been demolished. As one gets older this becomes more commonplace. One by one the buildings come down."

But Winnipeg, where Cohen was born and raised, is still very much home and that isn't likely to change any time soon.

James spent his early years holed up in his bedroom practicing his guitar, playing in high school garage bands and listening to Tom Petty, John Mellencamp, The Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan and Neil Young. By coincidence, James spent 15 years living two doors down from the Winnipeg house Neil Young once called home.

"I would often picture Neil Young, back in the early sixties hunched over his guitar, writing songs in his room, just a couple of doors away!"

Drawing from the inspiration of living in such close proximity to one of his musical heroes, provided Cohen with the motivation to keep writing songs.

Eventually, Cohen decided to make a serious career attempt at music and moved to Hollywood, where he studied and graduated from the prestigious Guitar Institute of Technology. Two years passed, during which time demos were written and recorded and major label interest came and faded.

Eventually, a move back to the Canadian Prairies presented itself; family responsibilities and a career with his family's real estate investment and securities firm called. Over the past two decades James has climbed his way up the professional ranks, but music has continued to be his refuge; the writing, recording and performing continued.

The new album pretty much brings Cohen full circle as the set showcases a mature artist who hasn't lost sight of what originally inspired him.

Another case in point on that front is the song that kicks off the new recording, *So Long Sweet Deception*.

"That was really the first song to get things going for this album. Obviously I am a big fan of sixties and seventies rock and two albums I really love are *Desolation Angels* by Bad Company and Sweet's *Desolation Boulevard*. I remember fooling around with a riff on my guitar and playing off those images and going with sweet deception and eventually hitting on *So Long Sweet Deception*. It's a kiss off song," says Cohen matter-of-factly.

As *So Long Sweet Deception* comes to a close Cohen wears his Rolling Stones influence on his

sleeve with Blues In Chains, a tune written from the perspective of “a guy down on his luck.”

“The song invokes an image of being trapped, living your life in the blues. As for the Stones thing, the song got it’s start by me fooling around with my guitar in an open G tuning, and then came the idea of a guy having to crawl back home.”

It’s easy to see why The Prairie Roots Rockers dove into these songs once they entered Winnipeg’s Wonder Dog Studios with producer Peterson. The band, bassist Bruce Jacobs (Streethart, Powder Blues Band, Sierra Noble), drummer Chris Sutherland (Kim Mitchell Band, Saga), blues guitarist BJ Garrison, and keyboardist Gerry Atwell (Ministers of Cool) are now readying themselves to take the tunes to the public in a live context.

“The Winnipeg scene is embracing this band and we still have venues that promote heartland roots rock. I enjoy being on stage and we’re fortunate that we’re well past living any rock and roll lifestyle,” laughs Cohen, who really does enjoy the best of both worlds.

James Cohen and the Prairie Roots Rockers is due out on October 2011 release on Edmonton, Alberta based SoccerMom Records in association with Six Shooter Records and Warner Music Canada.

Please visit the website [www.prairierootsrockers.com](http://www.prairierootsrockers.com) for updates and links to Facebook, Myspace, YouTube and SoccerMom Records.

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