

Facing forward

Ben Cooper of Radical Face goes west



Radical Face is working on some seriously rad tunes.

PHOTO COURTESY OF RADICAL FACE

BY MAXFIELD MORRIS

a weight off my shoulders. Like no one cares here. The things that made me a total weirdo where I'm from aren't even noteworthy now that I've moved."

He could introduce himself as a musician and not get a response of "What's your real job?" He could stop being a "freak," and that's been freeing brain space to focus on creative ideas—like the newest album for Radical Face, which is still in the works.

This tour, Cooper says, was initially planned to coincide with the new album, but he just hasn't finished it. So it's just a tour, and the audiences get to decide the set list at each show.

There's a recent re-release from Radical Face, finished last fall after Cooper got the rights back to his 2007 eventual-breakout album *Ghost*. He took the opportunity to remaster the songs and record some new versions of the songs, including an orchestral version of "Welcome Home" and some live versions of other tracks that showcase the progression of the album over time. He's also got a new single, "Reveries," that just released last week.

Between the music writing, the television work and every other project, Cooper says 95% of his work is done without the promise of a paycheck. It's always a gamble, and sometimes it shakes out really well. But plenty of times, nothing comes of it.

"I've found some comfort in realizing everyone is just as blind," Cooper said. "Like, no one really knows what'll work or what's going on. So I'm kinda fine with that."

As for now, Cooper is in a new town, talking to more strangers, on the hunt for stories and new creative endeavors. Sometimes you just have to do what you've been telling yourself you need to do, just to see what happens.

"I started learning that the fantasy and reality never match, so you just have to try it sometimes," Cooper said, "and if you get there and it sucks, you can leave." □

Ben Cooper has been talking to strangers more often. It's a new experience for the artist, who for the past 20 years has been making music under the name Radical Face and who's playing at Harlow's on Feb. 2.

The stranger-chatting coincided with a change in scenery. About a year ago, Cooper moved to Los Angeles County, where it's smoggy and gross sometimes, but that happens.

"Well like, if you're in a shit situation, you just jump," Cooper said. "I mean, that's kinda how I ended up in California. Because I grew up in Florida and had a lot of just bad years back to back, and it was time to go."

So he left, not with a huge plan or anything laid out in front of him, but he wasn't particularly worried about the seat-of-pants flying.

"Honestly, I've spent so much of my life winging it that I've done more winging it than not, so it is now my normal," Cooper said. "It takes away a sense of even having any real expectations. It's pretty much just following curiosity, and if you're enthusiastic about it, some shit shakes out—but it's not a good plan. I understand how most people would not want to live that way."

Coming to the West Coast was, among other things, an opportunity to get out of a court case against his family and an environment that kept him alert while with his boyfriend in public. Leaving the house always meant putting on a different face.

"Kind of a horror show for years, and yeah, growing up in the South as a gay dude, I don't have a lot of affection for it," Cooper said. "So when I left and came out here, probably the most notable thing is just

See Radical Face 7 p.m., Sunday, Feb. 2, at Harlow's, 2708 J St. Tickets are \$25-\$28; radicalface.com.

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