

Gregory Porter

Gregory Porter (born November 4, 1971)^[1] is an American singer, songwriter, and actor. He won the Grammy Award for Best Jazz Vocal Album in 2014 for *Liquid Spirit* and in 2017 for *Take Me to the Alley*.^[2]

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Early life and education

Gregory Porter was born in Sacramento and was raised in Bakersfield, California, where his mother was a minister. A 1989 graduate of Highland High School, he received a "full ride" (tuition, books, medical coverage, and living expenses) athletic scholarship as a football lineman to San Diego State University (SDSU Aztecs), but a shoulder injury during his junior year cut short his football career.^[3] At the age of 21, Porter lost his mother to cancer, but only after she entreated him from her death bed: "Sing, baby, sing!"

Career

Porter moved to the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn in 2004, along with his brother Lloyd. He worked as a chef at Lloyd's restaurant Bread-Stuy (now defunct), where he also performed. Porter performed at other neighborhood venues including Sista's Place and Solomon's Porch, and moved on to Harlem club St. Nick's Pub, where he maintained a weekly residency. Out of this residency evolved what would become Porter's touring band.^[4]

Porter released two albums on the Motéma label together with Membran Entertainment Group, 2010's *Water* and 2012's *Be Good*, before signing with Blue Note Records (under Universal Music Group) on May 17, 2013. His third album, *Liquid Spirit*, was released on September 2, 2013, in Europe and on September 17, 2013, in the US.^[5] The album was produced by Brian Bacchus.^[6] The album won the 2014 Grammy for Best Jazz Vocal Album.^[7]

Gregory Porter



Porter performing at the 2018 Kongsberg Jazzfestival

Background information

Born	November 4, 1971 <div>Sacramento, California</div>
Genres	Jazz • blues • soul • gospel
Occupation(s)	Singer • songwriter • actor
Instruments	Vocals
Years active	1998–present
Labels	Motéma • Blue Note • Membran
Website	gregoryporter.com (http://gregoryporter.com)



Porter in concert with his regular band at Cosmopolite club in Oslo, 2016

Liquid Spirit enjoyed commercial success rarely achieved by albums in the jazz genre, reaching the top 10 on the UK album charts. It was certified gold by the BPI, selling over 100,000 units in the UK.^[8]

In August 2014 Porter released "The 'In' Crowd" as a single.^[9] On May 9, 2015 Porter participated in VE Day 70: A Party to Remember, a televised commemorative concert from Horse Guards Parade in London, singing "As Time Goes By".^[10]

His fourth album, *Take Me to the Alley*, was released on May 6, 2016.^[11] In UK's The Guardian it was Alexis Petridis's album of the week.^[12]

On June 26, 2016, Porter performed on the Pyramid Stage at the Glastonbury Festival 2016. Writing for The Daily Telegraph, Neil McCormick said, "The portly middle-aged jazzier may be the oddest pop star on the planet but he is a refreshing testament to the notion that the most important organ for musical appreciation should always be our ears. And Porter has one of the most easy-on-the-ear voices in popular music, a creamy baritone that flows thick and smooth across a rich gateaux of juicy melody. It's a voice that makes you want to lick your lips and dive right in."^[13]

In September 2016 Porter performed at Radio 2 Live in Hyde Park from Hyde Park, London. He would go on to perform in the annual BBC Children in Need show in November, a night dedicated to Sir Terry Wogan, who hosted it in previous years and was a fan of Porter.^[14]

In January 2017 Porter performed the song "Holding On" on BBC One's The Graham Norton Show.^[15] In September 2017 he performed as part of the Later... with Jools Holland: Later 25 concert at the Royal Albert Hall.^[16]

In October 2017 he performed the song "Mona Lisa" on BBC One's The Graham Norton Show with Jeff Goldblum on piano.^[17]

Critical reception

Since his 2010 debut on the Motéma label, Porter has been well received in the music press.

His debut album, *Water*, was nominated for Best Jazz Vocal album at the 53rd Annual Grammy Awards.^[18] He was also a member of the original Broadway cast of *It Ain't Nothin' But the Blues*. His second album, *Be Good*, which contains many of Porter's compositions, garnered critical acclaim for both his distinctive singing and his compositions, such as "Be Good (Lion's Song)", "Real Good Hands", and "On My Way to Harlem". The title track was also nominated for Best Traditional R&B Performance at the 55th Annual Grammy Awards.^[19] In his review of *Water*, Kevin Le Gendre of the BBC wrote that "Gregory Porter has a voice and musicality to be reckoned with."^[20]

The New York Times described Porter as "a jazz singer of thrilling presence, a booming baritone with a gift for earthy refinement and soaring uplift" in its review of *Liquid Spirit*.^[21]

Michael G. Nastos of AllMusic wrote a mixed review of *Water*, stating: "In hard bop trim, Shorter's 'Black Nile' has Porter shouting out a lyric line that was done many years ago by Chicago's Luba Raashiek, but Porter's voice is strained and breaks up. While on every track Porter sings with great conviction, he's more effective on lower-key compositions", but went on to say that "he's right up there with José James as the next big male vocal jazz star."^[22]

Personal life

Porter has seven siblings. His mother, Ruth, was a large influence on his life, having encouraged him to sing in church at an early age. His father, Rufus, was largely absent from his life. Says Porter, "Everybody had some issues with their father, even if he was in the house. He may have been emotionally absent. My father was just straight-up absent. I hung out with him just a few days in my life. And it wasn't a long time. He just didn't seem to be completely interested in being there. Maybe he was, I don't know."^[23]

He is married to Victoria and they have a son, Demyan. Their home is in Bakersfield, California.

For public appearances, Porter always wears a hat reminiscent of a deerstalker incorporating fabric that covers his ears and chin.^[24] In a 2012 interview with Jazzweekly.com, when asked: "What's with the weird and wonderful hat?" Porter replied: "I've had some surgery on my skin, so this has been my look for a little while and will continue to be for a while longer. People recognize me by it now. It is what it is." In an interview with The Daily Telegraph in 2016, he divulged that he received some facial scars when he was "seven or eight", but declined to go into the specifics of how they were sustained. He said: "I just saw it one day (The hat) and said 'I'm gonna put this on, I like it.' It was before the music career. The cap is a Kangol Summer Spitfire."^[25]^[26]

Discography

- Water (2010)
- Be Good (2012)
- Liquid Spirit (2013)
- Issues of Life (2014)
- Take Me to the Alley (2016)
- Live in Berlin (2016)
- Nat King Cole & Me (2017)
- One Night Only – Live At Royal Albert Hall (2018)

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External links

- Official website (<http://www.gregoryporter.com>)
- Gregory Porter (<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm2232675/>) on *IMDb*
- Gregory Porter (<https://www.discogs.com/artist/202275>) discography at *Discogs* 
- Interviews: Gregory Porter discusses his life and music on 7th Avenue Project radio show: September 23, 2012 (Pt 1) (<http://7thavenueproject.com/post/32172802037/gregory-porter>) and June 23, 2013 (Pt 2). (<http://7thavenueproject.com/post/53942181434/gregory-porter>)
- Gregory Porter (<http://www.motema.com/artist/gregory-porter>) at *Motéma Music*

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