

Premiere: David Thorne Scott, “In The Still of the Night,” by Cole Porter

by Paul Zollo

American Songwriter is happy to bring you David Thorne Scott’s “In The Still of the Night,” by Cole Porter. It’s the first single from his new album *Thornewood*, and it reflects David’s embrace of the power of song to unite people. As Pete Seeger said, “All songwriters are links in a chain.” His music and new album exemplify this connection, as he fearlessly merges legendary songwriters of different genres and generations. He invites Harold Arlen, Cole Porter, Townes Van Zandt and John Denver all to the same party, and it’s a great one.

“The fury that accompanies red-state-vs.-blue- state thinking in this country is not sustainable,” said David. “Sooner or later we’re going to have to recognize the humanity in each other. I want jazz fans to love the mournful hollow tone of wide-open spaces. And I want fans of Americana music to love the electric crackle of city nights.”

We asked him to expound on his reasons for choosing this song by this singular songwriter, Cole Porter. It’s good that we did, as his answer is inspirational, and aligns with our mission as well, to unify people with the glory of great songs, while also honoring songwriting itself, and the songwriters who persist in keeping this ancient art alive and healthy.



DAVID THORNE SCOTT:

'In the Still of the Night' is a cheesy old beautiful 1937 Cole Porter song. I learned it as a teenager in Fred Waring's U.S. Chorus, which is like the Lawrence Welk of vocal music. Rich and creamy. Frothy, even. Chewy, gooey, choral goodness. Put you right to sleep with a smile on your face.

We did a lot of Great American Songbook stuff – Jerome Kern, Richard Rodgers, and of course Mr. Porter. Fast-forward to my debut album Shade. I took Cole Porter's 'Just One Of Those Things' and arranged the crap out of it. Tempo changes, blazing solos. At that time I always made sure my chord changes were the hippest, right-out-of-grad-school show-me-what-you-got reharmonization.

Since then, I've done less reharmonization and more what I call de-harmonization. Taking a tune and stripping it down. Using one chord where there were four.

I found that Cole Porter's music is ideal for this. First of all, his melodies and lyrics are gorgeous. Aching, haunting, atmospheric. Fun to sing. Words you can really chew on. His songs are easily deharmonized, and they sound great in any number of anachronistic grooves.

'In the Still of the Night' always struck me as a Roy Orbison or Sammy Davis, Jr. type of song. Dramatic, a bit operatic, with a healthy vocal range that really lets you build to a climax and then take your time coming back down. I had been singing it as a lullaby to my son because it's a l-o-n-g form, like many of Porter's tunes. So I wanted to do it in a way that breathed but still had a nice bubbly bounce to it, a slow-motion video of a mountain stream.

I started with a skank, that guitar upstroke from ska music that you also hear in the Police. Then the drum beat is from Ahmad Jamal's version of 'Poinciana'. Whenever I do a song with this groove in live performances, people always get big goofy smiles on their faces. You can play a tune for ten minutes in that feel and nobody gets bored.

Then, the baritone guitar, which has echoes of David Lynch, film noir, and cowboy music. Add a little lap steel and piano to taste. Then I channeled the Jordanaires — you know, that southern gospel quartet who sing harmony behind Elvis Presley and Patsy Cline? — and added some syrupy background vocals. (Tip of the hat to Fred Waring.) A trumpet solo weaving in and out of the whole thing like Lester Young with Billie Holiday.

The song has a 'Wait for it... wait for it...' quality that, amazingly, Mr. Porter keeps up for the entire form. At the end of the tune you are satisfied, but still kind of "waiting for it." Looking up into the night sky and seeing infinity, but you don't really mind that you will never get to the end of it. Do you love me? I will sit here in my cozy room, watching as the moon grows dim, and wait happily until you let me know.

This track is maybe an emblem of the whole Thornewood album, cover tunes and originals. A little bit ironic, a little bit earnest. A little bit city, a little bit country. A little bit sexy, a little bit cerebral. I'm not ashamed to admit that I'm a 'schooled' musician. I teach college, for crying out loud. But I try to use my powers for good. Every one of my music school tricks is deployed to serve the song and bring out colors you never noticed before.