

If you're at all plugged into the local music scene, chances are you know Jalen Reyes. With three releases under his own name and the countless other projects he's had a hand in, Reyes is a cemented and celebrated part of Savannah music. Growing up in church, Reyes was always surrounded by music, but it became his passion after learning the drums and finding rock and roll.

"I've had a pretty busy past couple of years, and that's kind of gone up and down. You know, there are busy seasons, there are lulls, just like in anything, but it has been pretty insane. But really fun." Over the last few years, Reyes has been known as the drummer of Reverend Bro Diddle and the Hips, as well as Dustin Price.

He talks about how being involved in so many types of music helps him grow as an artist. "It's gotten me to the place where you know, especially when I'm playing drums for any project, I just feel so comfortable. It's like becoming second nature which is so cool because I used to hear people talk about like—mainly older people that have been playing forever— they're like, "Yeah, you know, it feels like I can do it in my sleep" or you know stuff like that. I never really felt that and I still don't feel like that. It's challenging. And it's very nerve-wracking at times when like, you know, you might have not gotten as much rehearsal as you want or, you know, you're playing something completely new or the person you're playing with throws a song at you that you've never heard—that still is really nerve-wracking to me, but I'm starting to feel what they talk about."

"I used to kind of put that on the back burner," Reyes says of his own music. "But these days, I'm writing with a partner, Dylan Lee. He's a great local musician in town. One of my really, really best friends and we are just kind of taking it slow, but it's moved to the front burner with writing and stuff. It's just like an inspirational time."

The last time Reyes spoke with The Savannahian, he had just released his first album, *Worms*, a 7-song collection with a sort of country-folk sound and powerful lyrics. Since then, he's released two new singles: *I Am Carrying You* and *Mack's Truck*.

I Am Carrying You features two tracks, the title track and "Mistaken," both of which are almost entirely instrumental with a droning, sort of eerie sound that's so far from *Worms*. Of the sound on *I Am Carrying You*, Reyes says "It was just a riff that I played. I mean, it's not a riff. It's literally one chord. It's so fun to play, and it was kind of hypnotic. I was kind of into like, a lot of that 90s brand—Jonestown Massacre and all of that kind of just droney, vibey kind of stuff. So I put that instrumental together, and thought it sounded like a movie and I was like, that's cool."

On the difference between *Worms* and *I Am Carrying You*, he explains that the songwriting for *Worms*, which was released in 2021, took place over years, as far back as 2015. "I just still liked them at that time and wanted to get them out, so that was really fun. But even while I was recording that, my tastes had kind of changed and my writing style had already kind of changed. I was already looking forward, not even to the next project, but just to the next style of music that I wanted to even put time into.

"I don't really want to stay on genre thing." He says. "I don't really like to stick in one genre, and that's probably why I like to play a bunch of different stuff on the drums too, because it keeps it fresh. It keeps it really fun. I'm not really about switching it up just to switch it up. It's kind of just whatever's happening while you're writing, recording, and playing with friends. That should kind of be what it all rolls itself into. That's kind of my motto these days. It's like whatever comes out, it's going to come out. If I like it, if I think it's cool, if my trusted friends that I send demos to think it's cool, then, you know, let's do it. Let's put it out. So that's kind of my thought process on that now."

Reyes continued to put out what *he* wanted to put out with *Mack's Truck*, which sounds like the perfect hazy 70s rock song, worlds away from *I Am Carrying You*. Although the song itself flows easily, Reyes admits it took him a while to find it. "It took me so long to write that one too, which is so funny because it's just like a rock and roll song. I just had the first line first for like a year, and I would play it all the time. You know, when I was just playing guitar because it was fun to play and could never really write it."

Reyes likes to paint pictures in his head of a song or to imagine it like a movie, and *Mack's Truck* was no different. "I would play that riff and I was like, Oh man, I'm just seeing this trucker you know, this like space trucker hauling whatever you haul through space. But I could never write the song and then finally I just was like, "You know what, I need to finish it." It's so simple and it was really easy once I just sat down and like wrote out a little story. And that one was just a cool riff."

Mack's Truck also marked the official partnership of Reyes and Dylan Lee, who played guitar on the track. "Yeah, just kind of sparked something for us to work together. He wasn't super busy working on anything at the time, and then we started writing together and it just kind of snowballed and everything jumped off from there. In terms of like, now that I have a second you know, co-writer, co-producer, all this stuff. We're both bouncing ideas off of each other, so things are moving quickly."

Reyes, despite his success in Savannah, knows what he needs to work on. "Unfortunately, I'm not the kind of guy who can just write songs all day. When inspiration strikes, I can pin it down really fast, but I'm trying to figure out how to make it strike more frequently. That would be cool. But yeah, for now, I'm just kind of taking it slow, day by day with little stuff here and there. Some things are good, some things are bad, you know. *Mack's Truck* was definitely one of those. I was like, you know, just a killer."

As for this year, Reyes has a solid bunch of goals. He wants to focus in on his solo music and hopefully put something out in 2024. He wants to keep playing across town, across genres. He wants to branch out into new styles. He wants to work with his friends and record their music in his home studio. But most of all, he wants memories with music.

He says, "At the end of the day, you're just playing music with your homies and it's awesome, so that's really what I want—to keep playing music and eat this up. I tell my friends all the time, I

want to keep this up as long as we can. The older you get, the more people are in and out of your life, and that can be so scary and so, so daunting. I'm trying to just, you know, hold on to all those little times when we're playing together or we're recording and we get a cool little lick and it becomes a song. I'm just trying to keep those on my mind and stay full of gratitude for all this because it's really special. This little town is just incredible.”

Towards the end of our conversation, Reyes did want to include an important shout-out. “Everybody, you gotta check out Three Virgins and go to the website threevirgins.com. That is a bunch of my homies that get together every year on New Year's Eve. They record for 24 hours on New Year's Eve all the way up till midnight and release an EP.” He says that he thinks the concept is so fresh and cool, and hopes they continue.

Reyes is, without a doubt, evidence of the magic in the Savannah music scene. That free, unrestricted joy in music without labels or genre is proof, at least to me, that Savannah is a haven for creatives. If you're willing to jump, the community will be there to catch you, including Jalen Reyes.

Find Jalen Reyes on Instagram (@jalen_reyes) and Spotify (@Jalen Reyes)