

Jesse Cook Biography June 2024

Beyond his prolific accomplishments as a beloved Nuevo Flamenco guitarist over the past 25 years, JESSE COOK has honed his skills as a composer, producer, arranger, performer and filmmaker.

By the numbers, Jesse Cook has ten platinum and gold studio albums with combined sales exceeding two million copies, 700 million streams online, five concert DVDs and live discs, five PBS specials, a library of over 300 YouTube videos, a JUNO Award win and 11 nominations, three Canadian Smooth Jazz Awards, a Gemini Award, and an Acoustic Guitar Magazine Player's Choice Silver Award to his credit.

Jesse started down many of those diverse paths before he started school.

Born in Paris to photographer John Cook and TV producer-director Heather Cook, young Jesse also lived in Barcelona, where he picked up an interest in flamenco as a toddler. At six, after his parents divorced and he moved to Toronto with his mother, the prodigy attended the prestigious Eli Kassner Guitar Academy. During summers with his father in Arles in France, he soaked up more flamenco from neighbour Nicolas Reyes, leader of the world-renowned Gipsy Kings.

After attending the Royal Conservatory, York University and Berklee College, a comfortable career as a composer seemed in the cards — until an Ontario cable TV company aired his music on the listings channel. "Their switchboard got flooded with calls," he recalls. "People even got my number somehow and started phoning me at home and asking for a CD. And I was saying, 'I don't have a CD, I'm a background composer guy. I don't make records.'"

Seeing opportunity, Cook self-produced *Tempest* at home using an eight-track recorder and one microphone. Then he delivered the initial run of 1,000 CDs from the plant to the distributor in his car. Those humble beginnings quickly sparked a mighty international career, including an extensive discography of 14 albums so far.

"It turns out I did the thing I said I'd never do, and somehow it worked out. In the U.S., it was a breakthrough gig at the Catalina Jazz Festival, where his playing earned a 10-minute standing ovation, sparked mob scenes — "It was like being The Beatles," he marvels — and prompted one store to order enough copies of *Tempest* to land it at No.14 in *Billboard*.

In Poland, his 2004 live album *Montreal* took the country by storm. In India, he gained fame after one of his songs was plagiarized for a major Bollywood movie. ("In India, that's allowed," he explains. "They call it cultural appropriation — it obviously doesn't mean the same thing there.") In Iraq, his instrumentals scored the nightly news. Elsewhere, they've accompanied gymnastics and skating routines at the Winter Olympics.

"In Torino, both the Japanese and the Russian skater competed using the same song. One of them won. I think I should have got bronze," he jokes. No wonder Cook also quips that his music "has had a way more interesting life" than he's had.

Lately, that international appeal — reflected in a compositional style that mixes Flamenco with everything from Classical and Jazz to Zydeco, Blues and Brazilian samba — has become something he takes more seriously. "I've just always made the music that I love. But if music can come from around the world and interconnect so beautifully to create this beautiful tapestry, maybe there's something that music can teach us."

Many of Jesse's records have charted top 10 on the US Billboard Charts. Over the past three decades, thousands of concerts have been performed in dozens of counties. Some diehard fans have seen 20 or more shows. That fanbase has scaled exponentially with the digital reach his music and content now enjoy.

Suddenly, homebound in 2020, due to the pandemic, Cook doubled down creating content for social media. Connecting with his fans and creating a new YouTube series that amassed 2 Million views a month. A notable accomplishment during this time was the Love in the time of Covid video project. Jesse created one music video a week often playing all the instruments. The 31 videos of the series have amassed over 35 million views to date.

Sleeves ever rolled up, Cook worked tirelessly with his team to relaunch the "Tempest" Tour when live audiences became possible again in 2022. He performed over 80 shows with 80% attendance rate - well above the industry standard. More than 100,000 tickets were sold and a five-page article in Guitar Player Magazine reflected this widening appeal.

In 2023, Jesse's Libre Tour visited 85 markets. Jesse was invited to participate in Eric Clapton's Crossroads Festival of renowned guitarists in Sept 2023. Jesse's Instagram reels have become viral, with his audience continuing to grow at an exponential rate.

In 2024 and 2025, the "Jesse Cook Live in Concert" Tour will continue to expand with his growing popularity and the addition of new cities and larger venues.

"What do I call my music? I never know how to answer that question. Mostly I don't care, as long as it touches people's hearts" -Jesse Cook