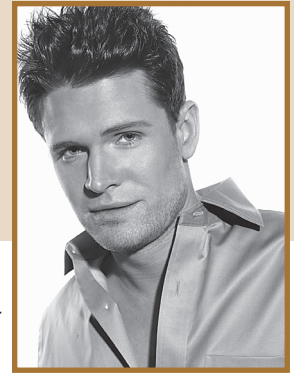


A Family Portrait

LUKE PARKIN

is a musician and composer. He studied keyboard performance and composition at the Amherst School of Music in Massachusetts. He also studied film scoring and electro-acoustics at San Jose University in California. Luke was a counselor at a TS camp back in 2000.



TSA: We've featured individuals with a wide variety of careers, including many musicians and a few composers. Please tell us a little about your work.

Luke: I'm primarily an instrumentalist and composer—a pianist more than anything else. My work is divided between commercial and classical instrumental. I move between the two. Although all of my training is in classical music, the album that I just released, "Winter Journal," has a more commercial flair than my experimental music. I also have a commercial catalog that is a large collection of music for TV and film, everything from 30 TV commercials to scoring a film. The newsletter readers have probably not seen any of the films I've worked on so far, but some exciting things are coming up, films with high visibility.

TSA: You've accomplished a great deal for someone at the very beginning of a career in music. How did your career get started?

Luke: I studied classical music very seriously since I was six. I made a conscious decision after college to move toward becoming a recording artist and composer as opposed to becoming a pianist playing classical repertoire. I always loved and played classical music, but I wanted to concentrate on writing contemporary music. I made the transition about three years ago, working with a manager and press agent, promoting my career as a recording artist.

TSA: Many people, both amateur and professional musicians, describe music as a refuge from TS. What do you think?

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Luke: It can mean different things to different people. For some, making music can be therapeutic. For me, it's the level of concentration and the serious intent of the music. Especially when I was a teenager and my tics were severe. It was the one place I could go where I had freedom from the tics. It's about the level of concentration. Music uses all your faculties—tactile, visual, aural—all the neurotransmitters are at work. It's fascinating.

TSA: Stress has a particularly negative impact on people with TS. How do you cope?

Luke: That's a good question. I cope with it much better than when I was younger. I manage through physical activity, by getting as much exercise as I can get. It also helps to be deeply engrossed in a project. One of the only times when you can see my tics is when I'm experiencing stress. They used to be prevalent all the time, no matter what.

TSA: When were you diagnosed with TS? And how did you react to the diagnosis?

Luke: I was very young when I first started showing signs and it got worse. When I was seven, I was involved in the first ever trial of Prozac. They were trying it on a very small unit of kids. This was before it became a household name. I'm not sure if it was the best thing for me. If anything I think it may have exacerbated my symptoms right after the trial. I'll never know.

This was in the late 80s and I think that treatment was still a bit primitive. What I mean by that is that ten years later things were much better and more sophisticated. They tried a number of medications on me. My tics were so severe they had to. We tried Haldol for ten years. I'm not taking any medication for tics right now. I know that things have changed for the better and that treatments are still in development.

TSA: How did your family cope with your TS?

Luke: It was pretty fractious. My father didn't then—and still doesn't—really understand what it was about. My parents' marriage was tense and troubled so he blamed the marriage. TS made it more difficult and added challenges, both social challenges and the challenges presented by medications. In puberty things got even worse. I was dealing with side effects and constant changes in my medications.

TSA: Do you have any siblings? And do you know of anyone in your family who also has TS?

Luke: I have two siblings and neither of them have any signs of it at all. We wondered for years if they would. It was an interesting thing to watch. I was told that there was a great uncle who exhibited symptoms but was never diagnosed. He was my grandmother's brother and it is very possible that he had TS.

TSA: TS has been in the media a great deal recently. What do you think of the media's role in disseminating information about TS and the quality of that information?

Luke: It's both positive and negative. The mainstream media seems to be the most extreme. The talk shows focus on the most severe and stereotypical traits and the most blatant coprolalia. They make a character out of TS. My friends and family all know I have TS, but newer friends will ask me about it (the confusion between the presentation and reality). It is the presentation that I take issue with.

TSA: What are your plans for the future?

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Luke Parkin

Luke: My plans are about my career, especially for the current album. I have a lot of things lined up including TV and radio interviews. I want as big a platform for my music as possible, to do more recording and hopefully go on tour next year. I'm becoming more well known—an emerging artist with more and more happening.

TSA: Do you have anything you'd like to say to kids with TS and their parents?

Luke: Children with TS are some of the most intelligent and creative people I've met. I don't think I've met a young person with TS who didn't have some kind of gift of intelligence or talent.

I think TSA is a great organization, especially for families having to go through the social hell or the accompanying problems with behaviors and medications. It can be traumatic and it seems like it will never end.

I had a severe case and when it was bad it was hard to see that it would ever change. It was pretty grim. As time went on, it dissipated. Of course I have to manage different aspects of it and I always will. It's a lot of work but it is very manageable—something that you can live with. I've been able to build a big career in the performing arts with TS. We'll take my career as far as it will go—no limitations.