

# MIKE DAWSON'S S.B. HOMECOMING

Longtime DeeJay Returns with The Smokin Kills to Play SOhO

**Y**ears ago, when terrestrial radio still ruled our listening lives, a gruff voice would hit the airwaves of KTYD every night from 7 p.m. until midnight, introducing rounds of rock 'n' roll as Santa Barbarans rolled the streets or sucked down beers on porches. That was the hauntingly distinctive voice of Mike Dawson, who left our city 15 years ago to work as a technical producer—later adding engineer and announcer to his title—for Adam Carolla's syndicated morning show, where he's been ever since.

Dawson never stopped playing music himself, and he just released *The Last Honky Tonk Hero*, a raucous and raw—though slickly produced—album with his band The Smokin Kills. Dawson's voice pairs to the gritty rock music like rolled cigarettes with lukewarm bottles of Coors Banquet, and they're sure to put on a wild show at SOhO on September 16.

Dawson fills us in about his life and music below. See a longer version online at [independent.com/smokinkills](http://independent.com/smokinkills).

**When did you start playing music?** I was gifted my grandfather's guitar when I was 15 years old. I still have it and play it often. My grandfather "Papa" loved Waylon Jennings. I'd listen to him play and always wanted to be like him. He died when I was in 3rd grade, so learning to play on his guitar was the closest I was able to get to him.

**Remind us of your legendary Santa Barbara history.** I graduated from UCSB in 1997 with

the dream of becoming a radio jock. So I kept my job as manager at Italia Pizzeria in Goleta and, every Monday morning, I knocked on the door of all the radio stations in town with my résumé in hand. Eventually I met Peter Bie, who was the program director for



**DJ DAZE:** Mike Dawson used to be the voice of KTYD more than 15 years ago.

101.7 K-Lite. He hired me on the spot as the board operator for Casey Kasem's *Top 40 Countdown* and Jim Brickman's *Weekend Morning*. Those gigs started at 4 and 5 a.m. on Saturday and Sunday, so my weekends were shot, but I didn't care. I had my foot in the door and my first job in radio.

From there I learned everything I could about radio, production, and promotional events. Thanks to folks like Rick Barker, Dayna Birkley, Keith Royer, and David Perry, I acquired my own air shift from 7 p.m. to midnight on 99.9 KTYD. I also became music director/assistant program director and was responsible for adding a lot of the music you still hear there today.

**How did The Smokin Kills begin?** About five years ago, I had two



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tickets to see Shooter Jennings at The Troubadour, and my friend bailed on me. So I put out on Twitter that if anyone wants to go to the show, just buy me a beer. I said, "I'll be the guy outside who looks like me."

Drummer Tyler Kershaw answered. As we were chatting over a pre-show beer, I saw Ted Russell Kamp walking around the floor. After some small talk, Ted asks both of us, "So, are you two in a band?"

There are times in your life where it can feel like the entire universe is trying to point you in a certain direction. When you feel those moments happening, roll with it. I looked at Tyler and said, "Well, are we?"

That was the night the band started. Tyler grabbed some good friends to join us on bass and guitar, Tim Hutton and Kevin Fosmark.

The funny thing about trying to put a band together in Los Angeles is you quickly learn that there are two types of musicians here: Those that are available and not very good, and those who are good and not very available. With this band, I lucked out.

**What can listeners expect from the album?**

Side one is destruction. Side two is redemption. It's like Merle Haggard joined The Black Crowes. The theme throughout is "California cowboy-troubadour Buck Owens in a black T-shirt in post-millennial Los Angeles." There are themes of being a Northern California kid in a Southern California world all over the place and, of course, there are a lot of references to drugs and alcohol. No surprise there. I like songs of "substance."

—Matt Kettmann



**LEFT THE ROOM:** Light Elephant roams the streets of Santa Barbara until September 22.

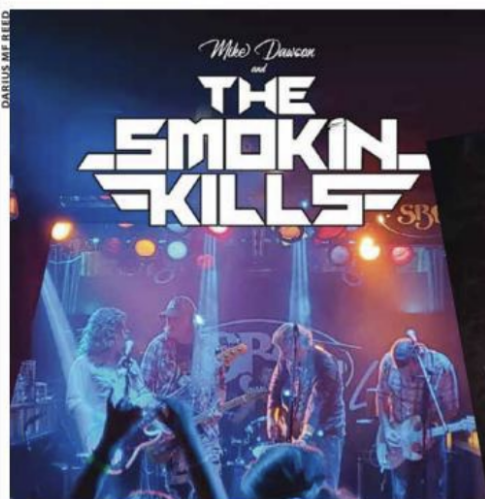
## Light Elephant Gets Out

If you are out and about in Santa Barbara over the next several weeks and you think you see an elephant, it's not necessarily the DTs. "Light Elephant," a 16-foot-tall "site reflective" inflatable public artwork, is part of a multimedia art project that's the brainchild of Iman Djouini, artist and professor at UCSB's College of Creative Studies and Department of Art, and Jonathan Taube, artist/architectural designer. When I spoke with Djouini by Zoom on September 2, she acknowledged that the rollout of this project has been somewhat mysterious by intention, saying that "we don't want to dictate what's going on" with how people interpret the project. Expect to see the elephant at various sites over the next several weeks until it settles down for a nap in the gallery at the Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara on September 22.

Part of the impetus for the project stems from a class that Djouini will be offering this fall through the College of Creative Studies. The class, Social Print Lab, examines the ways in which print and social media both capture and transform people's attention to public spaces. By placing something—in this instance, an inflatable elephant—in various public spaces and allowing people time to photograph and respond to it, students will learn about how social networks operate and how they influence our perceptions. Djouini and Taube encourage everyone to follow #lightelephant and #lightelephantsb along with the main feed, @lightelephants, on Instagram in order to participate in the project.

Each week in September will be devoted to exploring a specific one of the following themes: Public Bodies, Public Relations, Public Spaces, and Public Histories. The project's Instagram provides prompts that solicit reactions from individuals. For example, when the light elephant appeared at the Lobero Theatre, the prompt question turned on the theatrical tradition of the "ghost light," and asked viewers to respond to the question, "who are you leaving a light on for?"

—Charles Donelan



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