



Hutch Harris

PHOTO COURTESY OF HUTCH HARRIS

BY SUE ZALOKAR
STAFF WRITER

The Thermals co-founder reaches back with a "Hutch and Kathy" revival, and looks forward with a newfound panache for stand-up

Hutch Harris has been making music out of Portland for 20 years – the past 13 as a member of the post-pop-punk band The Thermals, which he co-founded with his musical partner, Kathy Foster. The group plays as a trio with Westin Glass

For the past year, Harris has been dipping his toe into the waters of the Portland comedy scene, and making somewhat of a splash.

This year, Harris and Foster toured as an original iteration of themselves, revisiting the album "Hutch and Kathy," which the duo released in 2002, before The Thermals were formed. The album has a more pop folk feel than the pop punk of The Thermals' sound. The label, Jealous Butcher, decided it wanted to put out a re-issue of the LP. It was a vinyl press.

You can catch Harris many nights of the week doing stand-up in town. A quick glance at his Twitter or Facebook feed will tell you where to find him next. It's all a matter of finding a balance.

"It's easy, we do music during the day, and

I go out and do comedy at night. Our practice space is close to Helium, so there are some nights where we'll practice and I'll just go straight over to Helium. It's awesome."

Sue Zalokar: *Hutch is a curious name. What's the backstory on that?*

Hutch Harris: Hutch is my mom's maiden name. It comes from the Italian "Ucci." When her grandparents emigrated from Italy, they just changed it to "Hutch" at Ellis Island. I don't know where they got that from. But it stuck. I didn't like growing up with the name Hutch at all. I like it now.

S.Z.: *It's been 13 years since you went on tour as Hutch and Kathy. What was it like to revisit that manifestation of a collaboration that spans decades?*

H.H.: It was great. Kathy and I have been playing music together for like 20 years. We've been friends for longer. We met in 1993 or 1994. She's my best friend in the world. I haven't been on tour without her in 15 years.

The tour was great. The record had never been on vinyl, and the Portland label, Jealous Butcher, they decided to re-release the record for Record Store Day this year. We decided to do some touring for it. It was pretty quick. We did a week and half on each coast. It was great.

S.Z.: *Any interesting stories from the road?*

H.H.: We did some touring with Allie Goertz, an LA-based songwriter, comedian. That was really cool. I've been doing stand-up for almost a year now. These are much quieter, more intimate shows than the shows The Thermals do. They were really fun shows and funny. We got to talk and interact with the audience a lot.

S.Z.: *You've had some different manifestations of the band, but you and Kathy have been there since the start. What is the trick to collaborating well?*

Comedy really makes me happy. I really enjoy it. ... It feels so different. It's really exciting, after doing music for so long, to have a new area of performance.

H.H.: You need to find someone who has similar tastes as you, but not identical. Kathy and I agree on a lot of things. Another important thing is to find someone whose opinion you trust. So that you can run an idea by them and if they don't like it, it's not something you will fight over.

Kathy is brutally honest, so she will tell me right away if she doesn't like something, but I trust her opinion enough that I don't take things personally. It makes things way more productive.

You don't want someone who just agrees with you on everything because then you might as well be working alone. And then you don't want someone who shoots down everything you come up with. It's too disheartening.

S.Z.: *Tell me the creation story of The Thermals.*

H.H.: It was 2002, and I was living alone in this really tiny house on Woodstock. Kathy and I had just finished that Hutch and Kathy record. We recorded it ourselves. We really took our time with it and did some touring. When we got back from that, I wanted to make something that was quick and fun as opposed to laboring over a record for a long time.

The first Thermals record, I actually just did it myself. I recorded all of the instruments on a 4-track cassette machine in the house where I lived. It was a fun little project I was doing. Once we started giving copies to people, they really liked it right away, and then labels got interested. It just happened really fast for us after that.

S.Z.: *You broke your chops a bit at Amy Miller's Midnight Mass and at a local Moose Lodge in a Southeast neighborhood – doing stand-up.*

H.H.: Amy's so great. She had a big hand in getting me started doing stand-up, too. I followed the Portland comedy scene for a while before I got involved in it. I was really