

# Jeff Porcaro

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**Jeffrey Thomas "Jeff" Porcaro** (April 1, 1954 – August 5, 1992) was an American drummer, songwriter, and producer best known for his work with the rock band Toto. Porcaro is one of the most recorded session musicians in history,<sup>[3]</sup> working on hundreds of albums and thousands of sessions.<sup>[4]</sup> While already an established studio player in the 1970s, he came to prominence in the United States as the drummer on the Steely Dan album *Katy Lied*. AllMusic has characterized him as "arguably the most highly regarded studio drummer in rock from the mid-'70s to the early '90s", further stating that "It is no exaggeration to say that the sound of mainstream pop/rock drumming in the 1980s was, to a large extent, the sound of Jeff Porcaro."<sup>[4]</sup>

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## Biography

### Personal life

Porcaro was born in Hartford, Connecticut, the eldest son of Los Angeles session percussionist Joe Porcaro and his wife, Eileen. His brothers Mike and Steve were also successful studio musicians and members of the band Toto. Porcaro was raised in the San Fernando Valley area of Los Angeles and attended Ulysses S. Grant High School.

On October 22, 1983, Porcaro married Susan Norris, a Los Angeles television broadcaster. They have three sons, Christopher Joseph (1984), Miles Edwin Crawford (1986), and Nico Hendrix (1991).

### Career

Porcaro began playing drums at the age of seven. Lessons came from his father Joe Porcaro, followed by further studies with Bob Zimmitti and Richie Lepore.

When he was seventeen, Porcaro got his first professional gig playing in Sonny and Cher's touring band. He later on called Jim Keltner and Jim Gordon his idols at that time.<sup>[5]</sup> During his 20s, he played on hundreds of albums,<sup>[6]</sup> including several for Steely Dan. He toured with Boz Scaggs before co-founding Toto with his brother Steve and childhood friends Steve Lukather and David Paich. Porcaro is renowned among drummers for the "Rosanna shuffle," a drum pattern he used on the Grammy Award winning Toto song "Rosanna", from the album *Toto IV*.<sup>[7]</sup>

Besides his work with Toto, he was also a highly sought after session musician. He collaborated with many of the biggest names in the music business, including Boz Scaggs, Paul McCartney, Dire Straits, Donald Fagen, Steely Dan, Rickie Lee Jones, Michael Jackson, Al Jarreau, George Benson, Joe Walsh, Joe Cocker, Stan Getz, Sérgio Mendes, Lee Ritenour, Christopher Cross, James Newton-Howard, Jim Messina, Barbra Streisand, Diana Ross, Eric Carmen, Eric Clapton, Miles Davis, Bruce Springsteen, Elton John, Larry Carlton, Michael McDonald, Seals & Crofts, and David Gilmour. Porcaro had contributed drums to four tracks on Michael Jackson's *Thriller*, as well as played on the *Dangerous* album hit "Heal the World". He also played on 10cc's *...Meanwhile* (1992). On the 1993 *10cc Alive* album, recorded after his death, the band dedicated "The Night That the Stars Didn't Show" to him.

Richard Marx dedicated the song "One Man" to him and said Porcaro was the best drummer he had ever worked with.<sup>[8]</sup> Michael Jackson made a dedication to Porcaro in the liner notes for his 1995 album *HIStory: Past, Present and Future, Book I*.

### Death

Porcaro died on August 5, 1992 at the age of 38. The rock star fell ill after spraying insecticide in the yard of his Hidden Hills home and died that evening at Humana Hospital-West Hills. According to one *Los Angeles Times* report, The Los Angeles County Coroner's office listed the cause of death to be a heart attack from atherosclerosis induced by cocaine use,<sup>[9]</sup> not from an allergic reaction to the pesticides as presumed immediately after his death and stated by Toto in the band's official history.<sup>[10]</sup> The official cause of death reported by the coroner has long been the subject of intense debate, with Porcaro's family, friends, and Toto bandmates claiming that while he did occasionally use cocaine, he was by no means a heavy drug user nor was he an addict. Most of the people that knew him state that the coroner's report is wrong, and that he died of a combination of undiagnosed heart disease and organophosphate poisoning caused by the insecticide he was spraying on the day he died.<sup>[11]</sup>

In a podcast recorded with *I'd Hit That* in late 2013, Steve Lukather spoke about Jeff Porcaro's death:<sup>[12]</sup>

**Steve Lukather:** I spoke to him the day he passed...he said, 'yeah, man I'll see you this weekend and we'll have a BBQ at the house and we'll go clean up the yard'...and that's when he got poison on himself and it turns out he had a bad heart anyway. He had two uncles that died when they were 40 years old from heart disease so it was genetic...this whole drug thing that came out its so insidious, and I hate the fucking fact cause he was never the bad drug guy...he'd be the guy going "what are guys staying up all night, you idiots"...in the early '80s and late '70s early '80s it was crazy man, we're not gonna deny any of it, but by the time he passed it was never, I don't know, people just love to roam the dirty laundry as Henley wrote you know...and you read these Wikipedia shit, that's right there, it's like does anybody ever do homework on these facts...he just had a genetic predisposition...this whole thing with his arms hurting and all this, he was always, 'my arms, my muscles', it wasn't his muscles, it was the fact that the blood was not getting to the extremities, he had hardening of the arteries at 38 years old.

Jeff Porcaro	
<span></span> <div>Jeff Porcaro on the drums on the Toto Fahrenheit World Tour in Blaisdell Arena, Honolulu, Hawaii, November 10, 1986</div>	
Background information	
<span>Birth name</span>	Jeffrey Thomas Porcaro
Born	April 1, 1954 <div></div> South Windsor, Connecticut
Died	August 5, 1992 (aged 38) <div></div> Los Angeles
Genres	Hard rock, pop rock, AOR, progressive rock, jazz, jazz fusion <sup>[1][2]</sup>
Occupation(s)	Musician, songwriter, producer
Instruments	Drums, percussion
<span>Years active</span>	1971–1992
Associated acts	Toto, Nik Kershaw, Sonny and Cher, Steely Dan, Boz Scaggs, Clover, Pink Floyd, Dire Straits
<span></span> <div>Jeff Porcaro's signature</div>	

**Interviewer:** How long was he complaining of the pain in the arms?

**Steve Lukather:** Years, it was debilitating to the point where touring became difficult for him.

Porcaro's funeral was held on August 10 in the Forest Lawn – Hollywood Hills Cemetery, where he was buried on the Lincoln Terrace, lot 120.<sup>[13]</sup> The Jeff Porcaro Memorial Fund was established to benefit the music and art departments of Grant High School in Los Angeles, where he was a student in the early 1970s. A memorial concert took place at the Universal Amphitheater in Los Angeles on December 14, 1992 with an all-star lineup that included Boz Scaggs, Donald Fagen, Don Henley, Michael McDonald, David Crosby, Eddie Van Halen, and the members of Toto. The proceeds of the concert were used to establish an educational trust fund for Porcaro's sons.

Porcaro's tombstone is inscribed with the following epitaph, comprised by lyrics from *Kingdom of Desire* track "Wings of Time": "Our love doesn't end here; it lives forever, on the Wings of Time."

## Equipment

Porcaro was an endorser of Pearl drums,<sup>[14]</sup> pedals, racks and hardware, Paiste cymbals, Remo drumheads and Regaltip drumsticks. He had his own Regaltip Jeff Porcaro signature drumsticks, which are still made by the company as of 2015. He used other brands of drums until joining Pearl in 1982, notably Ludwig-Musser, Gretsch and Camco.

## Discography

### With Toto

- Toto* (1978)
- Hydra* (1979)
- Turn Back* (1981)
- Toto IV* (1982)
- Isolation* (1984)
- Dune* (1984)
- Olympic Games 1984* (1984)
- Fahrenheit* (1986)
- The Seventh One* (1988)
- Past to Present 1977 - 1990* (1990)
- Kingdom of Desire* (1992, released posthumously and dedicated to Jeff's memory)
- Toto XX* (1998)
- Greatest Hits Live... And More* (DVD with behind the scenes footage and interviews)

### Other artists

- Seals & Crofts – *Diamond Girl* (1973), *Unborn Child* (1974), *Get Closer* (1976)
- Joe Cocker – *I Can Stand a Little Rain* (1974), *Civilized Man* (1984)
- Steely Dan – *Pretzel Logic* (1974), *Katy Lied* (1975), *FM (No Static at All)* (1978), *Gauche* (1980)
- Tommy Bolin – *Teaser* (1975) - "The Grind", "Homeward Strut", "Dreamer", "Teaser"
- Les Dudek – *Les Dudek Debut* (1976), *Say No More* (1977), *Ghost Town Parade* (1978), *Deeper Shades of Blues*, (1995), *Freestyle! (2000)*
- Leo Sayer – *Endless Flight* (1976) – "When I Need You", *Thunder in My Heart* (1977), *Leo Sayer* (1978), *World Radio* (1982), *Have You Ever Been in Love* (1983)
- Boz Scaggs – *Silk Degrees* (1976), *Down Two Then Left* (1977), *Middle Man* (1980), *Other Roads* (1988)
- Peter Frampton – *Breaking All the Rules* (1981)
- Eric Carmen – *Boats Against the Current* (1977) - "She Did It"
- Hall & Oates – *Beauty on a Back Street* (1977)
- Diana Ross – *Baby It's Me* (1977), *Ross* (1983)
- Colin Blunstone – *Never Even Thought* (1978)
- KISS – *Peter Criss* (1978)
- Larry Carlton – *Larry Carlton* (1978), *Sleepwalk* (1981), *Friends* (1983)
- Allen Toussaint – *Motion* (1978)
- Dave Mason – *Mariposa De Oro* (1978) – "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow"
- Warren Zevon – *Excitable Boy* (1978) – "Nighttime in the Switching Yard", *Mr. Bad Example* (1991)
- Ruben Blades - *Nothing but the Truth* (1988)
- Bim – *Thistles* (1978)
- Janne Schaffer – *Earmeal* (1979)
- Lowell George – *Thanks, I'll Eat It Here* (1979)
- Chicago – *Chicago 17* (1984) – "Stay the Night"
- Jackson Browne – *The Pretender* (1976)
- Pink Floyd – *The Wall* (1979) – "Mother"
- Aretha Franklin – *Aretha* (1980), *Love All the Hurt Away* (1981)
- Bee Gees – *Living Eyes* (1981)
- Randy Crawford – *Secret Combination* (1981), *Windsong* (1982)
- Al Jarreau – *Breakin' Away* (1981) – "Breakin' Away", *Jarreau* (1983) – "Mornin'", "Step by Step", "Black and Blues"
- Amii Ozaki – *Hot Baby* (1981)
- Greg Lake – *Greg Lake* (1981)
- Crosby, Stills & Nash – *Daylight Again* (1982), *Allies* (1983)
- Eye to Eye – *Eye to Eye* (1982)
- Michael Jackson – *Thriller* (1982) – "Beat It", "Human Nature", "The Girl is Mine", "The Lady in my Life", *Dangerous* (1991) – "Heal the World"
- Elton John – *Jump Up!* (1982)
- Melissa Manchester - *You Should Hear How She Talks About You* (1982)
- Donald Fagen – *The Nightfly* (1982)
- Herbie Hancock – *Lite Me Up* (1982)
- Don Henley – *I Can't Stand Still* (1982) – "Dirty Laundry", *The End of the Innocence* (1989)
- Michael McDonald – *If That's What It Takes* (1982) – "I Keep Forgettin'", *No Lookin' Back* (1985), *Take It To Heart* (1990)
- George Benson – *In Your Eyes* (1983) – "Lady Love Me (One More Time)"
- Christopher Cross – *Another Page* (1983) – *Rendezvous* (1992)
- James Newton Howard – *James Newton Howard and Friends* (1983) <http://www.sheffieldlab.com/sheffield.pl?artist=235&name=James%20Newton%20Howard>
- Lionel Richie – *Can't Slow Down* (1983) – "Running with the Night", – *Louder Than Words* (1996) – "The Climbing"
- Paul Simon – *Hearts and Bones* (1983) – "Train in the Distance"
- Randy Newman – *Trouble in Paradise* (1983) – "I Love L.A."
- David Gilmour – *About Face* (1984)
- The Jacksons – *Victory* (1984) – "Torture", "Wait"
- Paul McCartney – *Give My Regards to Broad Street* (1984)
- Joe Walsh – *The Confessor* (1985)
- Eric Clapton – *Behind the Sun* (1985) – "Forever Man"
- Roger Hodgson – *Hai Hai* (1987)
- Jon Anderson – *In the City of Angels* (1988)
- Dr. John – *In a Sentimental Mood* (1989)
- Clair Marlo – *Let It Go* (1989)
- Madonna – *Like a Prayer* (1989), *I'm Breathless* (1990)
- Twenty Mondays – *The Twist Inside* (1990)
- Michael Bolton – *Time, Love & Tenderness* (1991)
- Cher – *Love Hurts* (1991)
- Dire Straits – *On Every Street* (1991)
- Richard Marx – *Rush Street* (1991), *Paid Vacation* (1993) – "One Man"
- B-52s – *Good Stuff* (1992)
- Bruce Springsteen – *Human Touch* (1992)
- 10cc – *...Meanwhile* (1992)
- Roger Waters – *Amused to Death* (1992) – "It's a Miracle"
- Jude Cole – *A View from 3rd Street* (1990) – "Time for Letting Go", "Compared to Nothing" – *Start the Car* (1992) – "Open Road", "Tell The Truth".
- Paul Young – *The Crossing* (1993)

# See also

- Rosanna shuffle

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# External links

- Tribute site with complete discography of sessions. (<http://jeffporcaro.blogspot.com>)
- Official Toto website section dedicated to Porcaro (<http://www.toto99.com/jeff/tribute.shtml>)
- Porcaro page at Drummerworld ([http://www.drummerworld.com/drummers/Jeff\\_Porcaro.html](http://www.drummerworld.com/drummers/Jeff_Porcaro.html))
- 2013 Audio Interview with Steve Lukather talking about Jeff Porcaro from the I'd Hit That podcast ([http://idhitthatpodcast.podomatic.com/entry/2013-09-01T06\\_57\\_30-07\\_00](http://idhitthatpodcast.podomatic.com/entry/2013-09-01T06_57_30-07_00))
- Photos of Porcaro's grave at (<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=6330>) Findagrave
- jeffporcaro.net (<http://jeffporcaro.net>)

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Steely Dan members | Grammy Award winners  
Deaths from myocardial infarction | American rock drummers  
American jazz drummers | American session musicians  
American people of Italian descent | Toto (band) members  
Clover (band) members | American male musicians  
Burials at Forest Lawn Memorial Park (Hollywood Hills)  
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