

Ep.3.49 - Eddie Gillis

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SPEAKERS

Eddie Gillis, Announcer, Ed Clemente

- A** Announcer 00:01
Welcome to The Michigan Opportunity, an economic development discussion series featuring candid conversations with business leaders and innovators across Michigan. You'll hear firsthand accounts on how the state is driving job growth and business investment, supporting a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem, building vibrant communities and helping to attract and retain one of the most diverse and talented workforces in the nation. And now, your host, Ed Clemente.
- E** Ed Clemente 00:30
Welcome to the show. I'm your host Ed Clemente. And we're fortunate to have Eddie Gillis, he's the operations manager for Third Man Records located in the heart of Detroit. Welcome to the show, Eddie.
- E** Eddie Gillis 00:41
Hey, thanks so much, Ed, it's great to be here.
- E** Ed Clemente 00:44
Well, I like anybody named Ed. So you already got that going for you. [Alright.] Yeah. We've already met a couple times before. But, you know, I think that this is one of the jewels of Detroit in the short time, I don't know how many years you've been open now, but when did Third Man Records open up? It's been a while.
- E** Eddie Gillis 01:04
Yeah. So it did start with the label, which is Third Man Records, the manufacturing arm, Third

Man Pressing, we're just entering our seventh year of operation right now. So come a long way with the demand for vinyl records. And, Jack White, who is, I believe, the only artist who owns his own pressing plant. His idea was to press his own records. And that's kind of where the idea was born.

E Ed Clemente 01:40

So, you've worked with him and know them pretty well. your whole life. [That's right.] And I know that he started out though, so he created a label. And then he decided he wanted to also go into pressing records. Right? And beyond just recording, is that correct?

E Eddie Gillis 02:05

That's right. That's right. So, again, in the unique position, that he's the creator, the visionary, but also the owner of the company, gave him that leeway to explore that option of, what if I did this, what if I built a pressing plant? What if I just pressed my own records and then created these opportunities to learn how to make this craft production that we do, and just put out things that people want, but also just doing really cool stuff? And then that turning into something where we do cool stuff for other people.

E Ed Clemente 02:51

First of all, you're in more Midtown, right? Kinda?

E Eddie Gillis 02:57

Yeah, we still call it the Cass Corridor. [Cass Corridor, right.] Exactly.

E Ed Clemente 03:03

Why don't you actually give the, you're on Canfield, right?

E Eddie Gillis 03:06

That's right. We're on, actually, part of the Wayne State campus here, really in the heart of Detroit. And that's also kind of by choice as well. Jack wanted to bring this particular merchandise store, and then it was where it really started here in Detroit, but then we expanded into and built the pressing plant on site. But this area is home to not just a lot of firsts for Jack as a musician, and going to Cass Tech and growing up in southwest Detroit like myself, but also, the music history that is embedded in this neighborhood and the art community that's embedded in this neighborhood with Bob Sestok and the MC5, and the Stooges and stuff like that. So, it all just made sense to bring something back here that is

manufacturing, which goes hand in hand with not just the city but our state, and create an opportunity to do some really cool things and teach some people how to work together on this. So we have 16 presses and 60 employees now. Six-zero, you said, right? That's correct. Yep.

E

Ed Clemente 04:35

Yeah. Once again, we're with Eddie Gillis, he's the operations manager for Third Man Records. The timing though, I still shouldn't tell people I have albums in my basement. I always liked the medium, but why do you think people are so much into it again? Is there a reason you think why?

E

Eddie Gillis 05:03

Yeah, people are into records for so many different reasons. And it's not just one particular demographic, I think what we see just from the people that come in here is that it's all ages, it's the people like ourselves that remember what we grew up with. And that was all we had, it was, you know, vinyl records, and maybe some AM radio or something, but now, there are so many other opportunities to hear music and experience it. Vinyl is just one of those things that never went away and is still viable, and if not even stronger than before. For people that are discovering music for the first time, or just doing their homework and discovering all the old music that is stands the test of time as well. So when you see what we've done, created these opportunities for people to work here. But also that more and more little mom and pop record stores have popped up. And we're kind of a part of that music business that is supporting the artists, whether they be local or the heavy hitters out there. But also, you can see it in the neighborhoods where people are looking for more records. And you know, you can never have enough vinyl records. So I think we're part of that. That's in our backyard. And it's great to see that that has grown here organically or locally and regionally, but also across the country and across the world.

E

Ed Clemente 06:37

I've got friends that I know, they're like in their 20s and 30s. And they're always asking me if they can come over and take my albums. And I'm like, I don't know which ones I still want. But, they're almost like artifacts, like if you were like an archaeologist?

E

Eddie Gillis 06:57

Well, that's true. And then when you go hunting for them, right, you're looking for something very specific. I always half heartedly joke that, and you can use this one. Vinyl is a sound purchase. But actually, vinyl doesn't decrease in value, it actually holds its value, it actually might be worth something more, you may have a rare record you're sitting on but the fact of the matter is, is it's preserved on something that you can hold in your hand and you can trade it or give it away or pass it down to those those 20 and 30 year olds or whoever, so they can enjoy it.

E

Ed Clemente 07:42

Well, it's even funny too whenever you go to meetings now and you sit down with a lot of people, you know, in those age brackets, they all pull out notebooks too now, those the little notebooks. [Yeah.] And they write notes. And I'm like, wow, that's back and nobody's writing on their phones are actually taking real notes. I think there's maybe it's some of it might even be, I wouldn't say rejection, but sort of like they've had enough digitization in their lives, maybe and they like something else now, analog or whatever you want to call it.

E

Eddie Gillis 08:13

I agree. Yeah. I mean, it's very easy to stream an album. But to sit down and have another way to hear and listen to the same record, physically, is just as important. And it's nice to have that option. It's not just a lifestyle token, if you will, but it's something viable that you can enjoy just as much as you would on the digital side.

E

Ed Clemente 08:39

Even when you look at the biggest sort of mixers, a lot of DJs still mix, like with a physical album, right? When they're, I don't know where it's coming from, European mainly, but that movement here in Detroit.

E

Eddie Gillis 08:58

That's right, this is where techno was born. So the DJs thankfully, were the ones that kept vinyl alive, even when CDs took over, back when they got really strong there in the early 90s. And a lot of releases were not pressed on vinyl, because everyone assumed that CDs were just going to take over and vinyl was probably going to go away. But the DJs insisted on it. They kept it alive and the few pressing plants that hung on and are still pressing today saw through a tough time. But now like I said, it's come full circle. It's not just us, but there's more and more pressing plants. I think when we started seven years ago, there were around 25, maybe 30 plants in the United States. And now, I believe worldwide, there are over 200. [Wow.] So in the last seven years, a lot of them come online and a lot of them are poised to startup soon. There's another one here in Detroit that that just started this year.

E

Ed Clemente 10:16

I also would imagine coinciding with that people are probably buying record players now too more right?

E

Eddie Gillis 10:24

It's created demand for the record players and not just like a cheap little suitcase model, which you can get and get started with. But the high end stuff, the audio equipment, the speakers, everything that goes with it. I mean, even right here down the street, Shinola. They came out

with their own turntable. And at one point, this was the only place in the world where turntables are being assembled on the same block as records were being pressed. So that was pretty cool.

A

Announcer 10:56

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E

Ed Clemente 11:18

Why don't you highlight some of the ones we talked about before but people that have come to you, that people would be surprised because I think that Third Man Records is like, one of the most interesting things about Detroit, even though like you said, it's been seven years. But I always, when I give tours of Detroit, I always make sure I go by your place and point it out.

E

Eddie Gillis 11:38

We really appreciate that. So starting in 2014, I believe, is when we started the store. You know, we've gotten to be a part of a lot of interesting projects along the way when the pressing plant open. So the like I said earlier, the idea for Third Man Pressing was that Jack would press what was on his his catalog, and then all the other titles that were on our catalog and just press them here in Detroit. And then when we started to explore and look for other projects and cool things that we wanted to do, whether it be a reissue of an old record or something, we discovered that we put out a boxset of the Supremes, for example. And we realized that we were the first pressing plant to press Motown Records in the city of Detroit. Motown Records were never pressed here in the city. And not a lot of people knew that.

E

Ed Clemente 12:37

I didn't know that. Yeah. I fell into your trap.

E

Eddie Gillis 12:44

So, one thing leads to another right? And before you know, we have kind of a line out the door of the you know, the band down the street or somebody putting out their very first record, the boutique labels as well as the bigger labels, your Warner's and Sony's and Universals and stuff that we started getting the attention and that kind of trust built in like, we're not just some novelty, we're making real records and we care about that quality. So we got to get involved with other projects. We did a Prince box set, for example, we've done some Rolling Stones represses. So records that I you know, that I grew up with, I'm holding in my hands like, Wow, we press this right here in the city of Detroit. It's a really wild, full circle moment in those regards.

E

Ed Clemente 13:38

And you've also had a couple kind of famous people stopped by do right when they come to town, right?

E

Eddie Gillis 13:43

Yeah, it's a destination place. So recently, Metallica was playing a show and we did a book signing for the lead singer, James Hetfield had a book out. So we do these kinds of events here. We also have people that want their record pressed here. So to get to work with someone like, perhaps you've heard of Paul McCartney. [I think so.] His third solo record of his career was pressed here exclusively here in Detroit, all of the eight variants of that record that came out, he wanted them pressed here in Detroit. So it pays to have some friends in high places to be able to get to work with an icon like that. As well as just, like I said, the band down the street or someone just starting out.

E

Ed Clemente 14:36

I was gonna mention too you also sell other things too, not just records right at the place, like clothing?

E

Eddie Gillis 14:46

Correct we're always looking to seasonal items and merchandise and things that can promote our brand. On the third man side, whether it be the pressing or the label side, as well as any of the Jack White and White Stripes related things and of course, all the different records. We just started a project with through The Verve Label and the Blue Note Label and are doing some really cool re-issues of some classic jazz records and they're being really well received. So we're trying to make those exclusive, but also part of our TMR catalog. More and more to come.

E

Ed Clemente 15:38

I was gonna ask you too, once again, our guest is Eddie Gillis. He's the operations manager for Third Man Records. I just want to talk a little bit about your background, a little bit just because my family grew up over by Spring Wells and Lafayette. [Right.] And you, I think your family, did you guys belong to Holy Redeemer or no?

E

Eddie Gillis 16:00

That's correct. We're the the stereotypical Catholic family of 10 kids, seven boys and three girls, and we grew up in southwest Detroit in the Holy Redeemer and St. Hedwig area over by Clark Park. The true melting pot of Detroit [Still is.] Absolutely, absolutely. So proud to be born and raised and have that experience. Wouldn't trade for anything. What I did before I pressed record was, I was a pastry chef for 30 years, transferred from the food service industry and

doing that at a high level to manufacturing and found the similarities as well as the hiring and finding the talent, which is all over in this area. So we put together a really good mix of people that are really detailed focus, but also talented on the mechanical side and the creative side to kind of run this place like a kitchen in a sense, where you're taking raw material and turning it into something that looks good enough to eat but looks good enough to listen to as well.

E

Ed Clemente 17:25

Well, you know, the place we met, and I'll put a plug in for it. But there was a plaque put in not too long ago for Tejano music. And I'm probably saying it wrong. [No, that's it. Yep.] Yeah, yeah. And you spoke at it, actually. But our friend Ray Lozano was involved. And Roberto from the Mexican Counsel was there. But that was a great event. And did you guys, did you say you've cut some vinyl for them too, or no?

E

Eddie Gillis 17:55

We released a record in 2020. That was a compilation of recordings from a Tejano musician that had been recognized as a Hall of Fame pioneer, bringing the music from Texas to Michigan, after we released that record, it turned into a project of what else could we do to commemorate this legacy and preserve it. And through the Michigan Music Hall of Fame, we were able to apply for a historical marker through the State of Michigan, and it got approved and we were ecstatic to be able to place that at the corner of Bagley and 21st in southwest Detroit. So, again, giving something back to the neighborhood that was again wasn't planned from the beginning, but it just it grew out of something which so many things have here in our company and through Jack's vision but also his leadership.

E

Ed Clemente 18:58

Yeah, I just find southwest Detroit to be such a unique place in the city, but even in Michigan. I still love going there because I live down river and it's not too far for me to go there a lot. Beyond all those things, but do you guys have any future trends you might see for your industry a little bit?

E

Eddie Gillis 19:24

Yeah, so in the record making business, specifically vinyl making business, of course keeping up with the demand that keeps increasing each year. The growth and the physical sales, the numbers keep going up. So keeping up with that demand, but also trying to create more unique and exclusive opportunities, not just for employment, but also to keep the people out there that are collecting to keep them excited, bringing new materials, there's always new developments in compounds and things like that. So trying to create something that hasn't been made before. Keeps it really exciting for us. And as well as the more plants come online, we kind of get to share ideas, we are all in this together in a sense, and share best practices as well as obstacles that may pop up and how to get through them. So there's lots more releases coming, people

have gotten back out on the road. Hopefully they'll get back in the studio. And then from that is what feeds the demand as well. And people always looking for new stuff, but also getting inspired by all of the old things, some of which have never been pressed on vinyl.

E

Ed Clemente 20:49

Oh, yeah. Because of the digital era.

E

Eddie Gillis 20:51

We've got some of those releases coming out soon, too, some things that we discovered that hadn't been pressed on a record. So people love that. And they love the different genres, whether it be international-type records, and always looking for something different. So we're trying to cover all our bases there.

E

Ed Clemente 21:10

There's lots of new groups always changing the culture in the Detroit area, period. Yeah, yeah, no, I'm very excited, you guys see nothing but upswing for you. And any advice you would give back to your high school 17 year old self about career-wise.

E

Eddie Gillis 21:33

If you have an interest in something, whether it be something mechanical or something creative, just to always just keep practicing as anyone would tell anyone to stick with it, and explore all the different possibilities and just kind of be ready to be able to lead is important, I think and understand that someone has to take the reins, someone has to stand up and either give support to people or take the lead in a situation and to try to find that and not to be afraid of that.

E

Ed Clemente 22:15

Yeah, I think too that, when I listened to like you changing careers, or your brother, coming out of an area that probably most people didn't expect people to do really well. Right? So that's good advice. Because who knows what, it's hard to have vision when you're younger sometimes.

E

Eddie Gillis 22:39

I wish we knew what the next big thing was, but no one can predict it. So that's the thing is you stick with something that you're true, and that you believe in. And you know what, there's always a good chance that someone else, it's going to open their eyes and ears and they're going to be open to it.

E

Ed Clemente 22:59

Well, on behalf of the Michigan Economic Development Corporation even know Jack White might not even know what that is. But if he did, tell him we're very proud of what you are doing there at the corporation and his investment in the city and the state. And I know he did a lot with, which building was it, the Masonic Temple, too? [That's correct.] Yeah. So I mean, that was a big concert venue for me when I was growing up. And so we keep appreciating it. And we appreciate all the work your whole family has done for the area. And keep up the good work. With that. Again, our guest was Eddie Gillis. He's the operations manager for Third Man Records. And I hope we can continue this conversation once you come up with some other new things someday in the future too, Eddie.

E

Eddie Gillis 23:48

Thank you so much, Ed. Appreciate you inviting me on. And it's always great to get to talk about what we're doing here and just encourage people to just keep the keep the foot traffic coming. And this is a destination place for people from around the world now.

E

Ed Clemente 24:04

Joining us next week where our guest will be Mark Kramer. He's the president and CEO of SME, an engineering firm with projects including Notre Dame Stadium to Gordie Howe Bridge.

A

Announcer 24:14

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