

TEGAN AND SARA + RA RA RIOT + THE JOY FORMIDABLE

# VARIANCE

THE SIGHTS + SOUNDS YOU LOVE



CAN THEY "HO HEY" THEIR WAY TO THE GOLD?

# THE LUMINEERS

**2013 GRAMMYS!**  
NEW FACES &  
INDIE FAVES RULE:

FRANK OCEAN  
MUMFORD AND SONS  
ALABAMA SHAKES  
GOTYE & KIMBRA  
FUN.



PARKS & RECREATION'S RETTA

ZZ WARD

PARENTHOOD'S MAE WHITMAN

LOCAL NATIVES



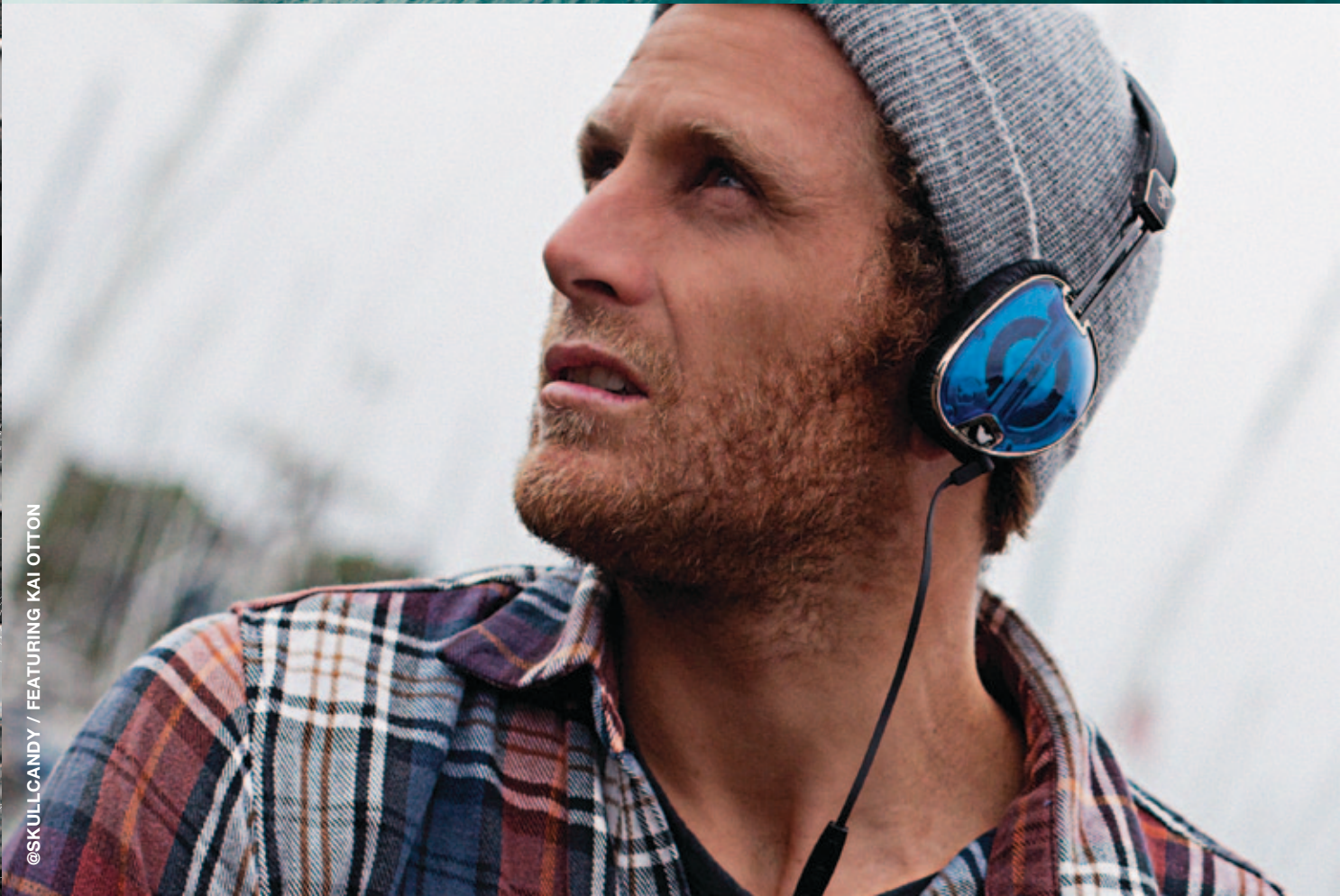


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A close-up photograph of a woman with long, wavy brown hair, singing intensely into a black microphone. Her eyes are closed, and her mouth is wide open in a powerful vocal performance. The lighting is warm and dramatic, highlighting her features and the texture of her hair. The background is softly blurred, showing a patterned wall.

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# FIRST THINGS FIRST

WELCOME TO 2013

HERE WE ARE AT THE START OF ANOTHER YEAR. CRAZY, RIGHT?

With our Winter 2013 issue, it was important for us to reflect on the milestones of 2012. It was certainly a big year, full of incredible music and culture stories that mattered to you—and we did our best to bring you up close with so many of them.

Kicking off the new year with a bang, many of last year's standout acts—fun., Gotye, Kimbra, Mumford and Sons, Frank Ocean, Alabama Shakes and The Lumineers—are now up for Grammys, all first-time nominees in major categories. They had your attention, and you had ours. Listening intently to your feedback, we made it our goal to spotlight the indie singers and pop culture events that stunned their respective industries.

In August, we launched version 2.0 of our website, which was admittedly in need of improvement.

Variance had outgrown its former home as it evolved, so we made it easier to navigate to the content you love.

In this first issue of the new year, we're zeroing in on some of the best new music from your favorites—Ra Ra Riot, Tegan and Sara, The Joy Formidable and Local Natives. We've got some of the best bets of 2013 in our FutureSounds, as well as some TV fan favorites: *Parks and Recreation's* Retta, *The Office's* Creed Bratton and from *Parenthood* and *Arrested Development*, Mae Whitman.

With the Grammys just around the corner and so many reader favorites up for some of the biggest awards, we're taking you along the Road to the Grammys with The Lumineers, one of 2012's biggest breakout acts, overwhelmingly loved by *Variance* readers. We're also deliberating Frank Ocean, Mumford and Sons, Kanye West, Gotye and some of the others' chances of winning.

Moving forward into 2013, we will continue to bring you the best stories and most intimate interviews. Last year was a great year in Sights and Sounds, but we fully anticipate 2013 to be greater. There are so many acts set to release new music: Phoenix, The Black Keys, Paramore and many more. There will no doubt be plenty of amazing festivals and new TV and film favorites. We'll be following along, as we know you will be. And we'll be listening for your thoughts and opinions to determine the best and the brightest.

As always, your feedback is important. In fact, it's critical to what we do. Let us know what you think of the new issue and new website. All that's missing is you. After all, these are The Sights and Sounds *You Love*, and we're committed to keeping it that way.

Wishing you a Happy New Year,  
Variance Team





**SOLANGE KNOWLES**

"Losing You"

by @Johnny\_Rudge



**RA RA RIOT**

"When I Dream"

by @ChristophrRice



**CAT POWER**

"Silent Machine"

by @lorgcor



**CHROMATICS**

"Lady"

by @SamJeastwood



**MACKLEMORE  
& RYAN LEWIS**

"Can't Hold Us" feat. Ray Dalton

by @shannonxxholly



**DUCKTAILS**

"Letter of Intent"

by @sfmarianna2



**LOCAL NATIVES**

"Breakers"

by @spaqmodelique



**C2C**

"Down the Road"

by @deuxcolors



**MIKKY EKKO**

"Pull Me Down"

by @davidhickland



**ALICE RUSSELL**

"Heartbreaker"

by @AddieSan



**A\$AP ROCKY**

"Long Live A\$AP"

by @jwcnew



**BEN HOWARD**

"Oats in the Water"

by @eL\_conde

*OUR WINTER '13 PLAYLIST  
—PREPARED BY YOU*

MIXTAPES





# CONTENTS

# VARIANCE

Winter\_2013, Vol. 4, Issue 1

## Editorial Director

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## Features Editors

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Danny Feld

Stefan Georgi

Adam Glanzman

Lei Han

Chris Haston

Colleen Hayes

Art Heffron

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Cybele Malinowski

Andrea Michele Piacquadio

James Minchin

Andrew Moore

LeAnn Mueller

Heidi Ross

Bryan Sheffield

Emily Shur

David Titlow

Eli Watson

Jennifer White

## Web Production & Design

Nicholas Clayton

JP Jones

Jonathan Robles

## Project Development

Bryan Norris

- 05 **Winter '13 Mixtape (Playlist)**
- 08 **Creed Bratton of *The Office***
- 10 **Local Natives**
- 12 **Mae Whitman of *Parenthood***
- 14 **Photo Diaries: Winter '13**
- 20 **Big Gigantic**
- 22 **The Joy Formidable**
- 26 **Kimbra**
- 28 **Grammy Watch**
- 32 **Artist Confessional: Felony Case**
- 34 **Ra Ra Riot**
- 38 **FutureSounds**

## 42

## The Lumineers COVER STORY

- 48 **Web Wonder: Conor Maynard**
- 49 **Ear Candy**
- 52 **Retta of *Parks and Recreation***
- 54 **ZZ Ward**
- 56 **Tegan and Sara**
- 60 **Gregg Sulkin of *Pretty Little Liars***
- 62 **Overcoming Affliction**

**THE SIGHTS AND  
SOUNDS YOU LOVE.**

[www.variancemagazine.com](http://www.variancemagazine.com)



An aerial photograph of a city skyline, likely New York City, taken from a high vantage point. The sun is setting, casting a warm, golden glow over the buildings and the water in the distance. The sky is a mix of orange and yellow, and the city lights are beginning to twinkle. The buildings are dense and tall, with many windows reflecting the light. The water in the distance is a dark blue-grey color, and there are some bridges visible. The overall scene is a beautiful and iconic representation of a major city at dusk.

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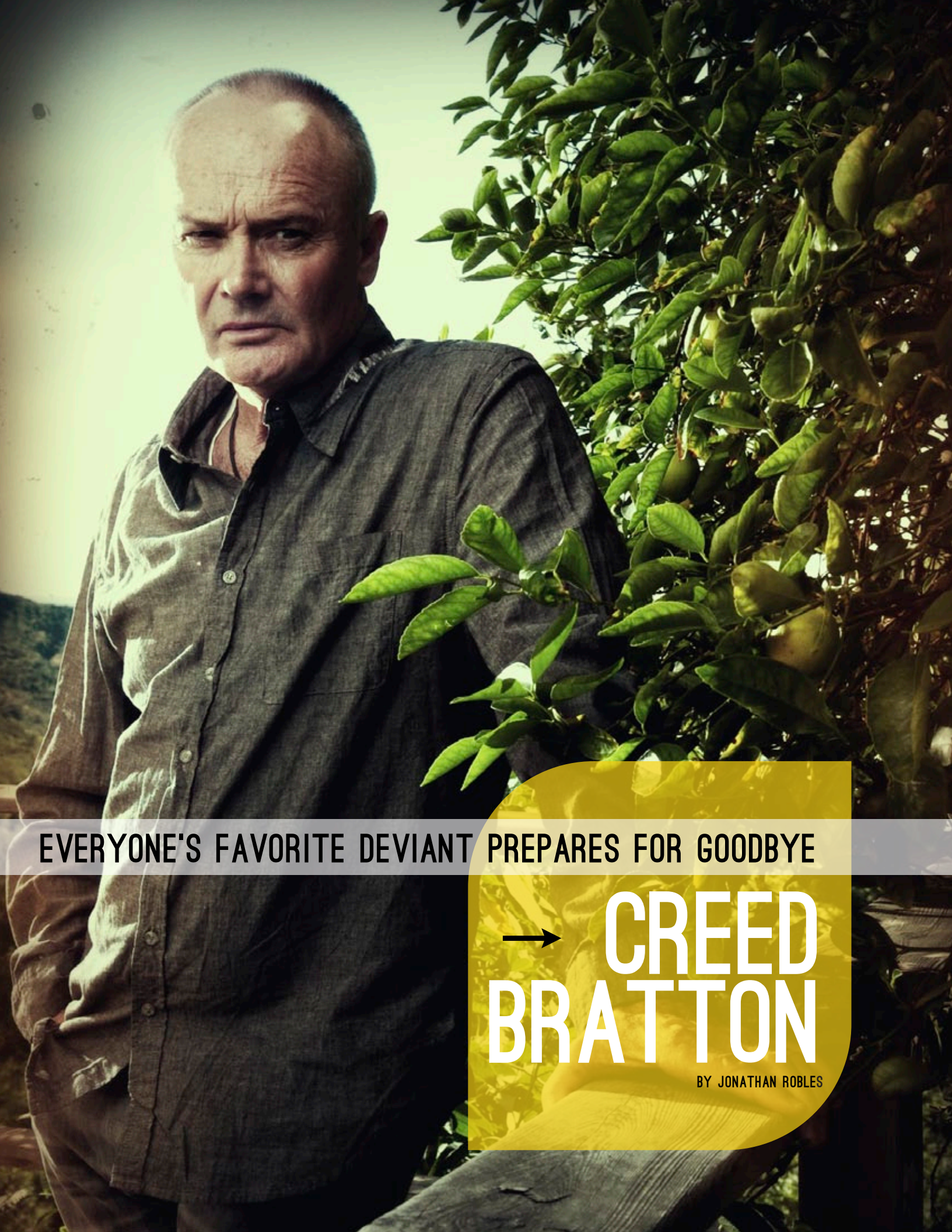
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**\*Some of our most interactive, most influential readers—those who provided the most entertaining and/or most valuable feedback in 2012, while being an advocate of great Sights and Sounds! Without our readers, we simply don't exist. Thank you! Be on the alert: Power Users will be even more important this year!**





EVERYONE'S FAVORITE DEVIANT PREPARES FOR GOODBYE

→ **CREED  
BRATTON**

BY JONATHAN ROBLES



As NBC's beloved comedy series *The Office* heads into the homestretch of its final season, reality is setting in for the cast, many of whom were part of the show's very first episode eight years ago. One such actor is the man who has stolen scenes—and somehow, our hearts—since back in 2005. Creed Bratton sits down with Variance to talk about...Creed Bratton, and the future.

The final 15 episodes begin Jan. 10 on NBC.

## Q&A

**VARIANCE:** So we've been following the show since the beginning, through the ups and downs and everything. But this season it definitely feels like a burst of creativity just kind of hit the show. What's the vibe like on set?

**CREED BRATTON:** I think I'd have to agree with John Krasinski (Jim); it has a lot to do with [creator] Greg Daniels coming back. Greg Daniels and also the writers and everybody wants to go out this last season with our head held high. Right now, we know that we're doing it together. Last season, we weren't really laughing at the table reads. This year, we're howling, just screaming at table reads. Today, we were laughing so hard. Carrie Kemper wrote one of the episodes we were just working on—Ellie's [Kemper] sister. We were laughing so hard.

**VM:** You're right. This year, it feels like there is a fresh vibrancy to the show. It's crazy.

**CB:** They used to call it "cringe-worthy" like the second, third, fourth season. It's "cringe-worthy" *Office* because you go "ah, no" and then we wait a little bit for reactions. Last season, they were trying to get so much stuff into [the dialogue] without letting it breathe. You've got to wait for people's reactions.

**VM:** You've been known as a bit of a scene stealer. Who gets credit for that? Is that the writers? Is that you?

**CB:** Well, we have some great writers and they put together some fantastic material. They're blowing us away this year. But we have some room to act in the moment—improvisation.

**VM:** Well, it's hilarious.

**CB:** Thank you. I think the disappointing thing is people meet me in real life and they go, "You're not like your character!" (Laughs) People seem to forget that sometimes.

**VM:** Sure, it's fiction but are there times where you kind of find yourself slipping into character?

**CB:** When I'm over at Whole Foods and shopping, I'll have to bite my tongue. I may start to make a little comment and then I go, "No, they might not have seen the show." They're just going to see me as some strange weirdo, so I have to curb the instinct once in awhile, because people might not understand.

**VM:** Since *The Office* is winding down, where do you see yourself going in the future?

**CB:** I went back to the studio and finished up the last song off my next solo album. When this is over, I'm going to be touring the East Coast. But we were getting offers for stuff before, and I couldn't do it because of the show. The music is something I absolutely love, but acting is still my priority. I still do love being on stage and writing songs so much. It's back and forth between the two of them. I'm trying to get greedy and do both.

**VM:** Would you ever do another series?

**CB:** I would, but this is a hard act to follow. This is *The Office*, and the stable of writers we have—they're really talented individuals. I've got some ideas; I've written a screenplay. I've got a couple of people writing screenplays for me. So, yeah, we'll have to see it play out, but never fear because "Creed" will be leering his weird-looking head. (Laughs) I would get so bored if I didn't work. I'm only sixty-nine years old. The Rolling Stones, they're still rocking. I mean, seriously they're rocking hard and maybe sounding better than they have. I'm excited about the future.

***The Office* airs Thursdays at 9 p.m. on NBC.**





# LOCAL NATIVES

BY AARON LACHMAN



California-based band Local Natives are no stranger to hard work. Coming together after college, they all moved into a house together and wrote the album *Gorilla Manor*, funding its release by themselves. After gaining attention with multiple SXSW appearances and relentless touring, both alone and with bands like Edward Sharpe and the Magnetic Zeroes, they gained favorable reviews and released *Gorilla Manor* on Infectious Records in the U.K., and Frenchkiss in the U.S. Now, in 2013, the band (Kelcey Ayer, Ryan Hahn, Taylor Rice, and Matt Frazier) is set to release a new record, called *Hummingbird*, and are headed out on another round of international tour dates. We caught up with drummer Matt Frazier and asked him a few questions about songwriting and life as a Local Native.

**Q:** You guys have a new album coming out. How is it different from *Gorilla Manor*?

**A:** It's been a long time coming for us, having put out our last album almost three years ago. We're really excited and feel like it's kind of a stepping stone for us. We feel like we kind of pushed ourselves in a different direction, and we're excited.

**Q:** What's your songwriting process like?

**A:** Each song has its own story. Some of them could've been, you know, one of the guys bringing this melody line to the table and us just jamming in the studio. Other times, someone will have a fully fleshed-out idea of a song and handle it themselves. It's all kind of different. It's an interchangeable parts kind of thing.

**Q:** So you work together, you don't necessarily have a primary songwriter?

**A:** Lyrically and vocally, something will come from either Taylor, Kelcey or Ryan. They'll bring a rough idea and we'll all flesh it out as a band together.

**Q:** You all are noted for your harmonies. How do you work those into your songs?

**A:** We never sought out to do—like, we never said we're going to be this kind of band; we're going to be a harmony band. In the early days when we started, it was just one guy singing, and there were little bits of harmonies here and there, but more and more people started singing, just taking initiative, and I think just the fact is especially that Ryan, Taylor and Kelcey have been singing together so long and they all have such distinct voices that it just naturally kind of became this thing where they were really good at harmonizing with each other. There's definitely still that element with the new music, but I think it's a different take on it. It's not harmony for the sake of harmony. We kind of dialed it back a little bit and maybe it's just a little [less] in your face than it was before.

**Q:** You have a lot of international touring coming up. Is there anything you're looking forward to in particular?

**A:** I think just generally we're looking forward to touring. It's been a while since we really hit the road. We were touring behind the first album for what felt like probably three years pretty much full on. We really love touring. It can be exhausting, but we really enjoy it. We love playing shows all the time. We're just excited to get out there, especially with a bunch of new music to show people, so that's really exciting. It's a totally new, fresh experience for us.

**Q:** How long did you guys take off from touring to work on the new album?

**A:** We finished up the last bit of touring in the beginning of 2011 and that's when we started to disappear and we got this practice space in order and we started writing full on. I'd say it was probably a year and a half, finding a studio, writing, recording, all that.

**Q:** You all played with the L.A. Philharmonic. What was that like?

## Q & A

**A:** Well, it wasn't actually the L.A. Phil, it was a 23-piece orchestra that was put together by this composer that we worked with, Neel Hammond. We were offered to do that show at the Walt Disney Concert Hall, and we wanted to do something really special, so we were able to put together an orchestra to play with. Equally awesome in our eyes.

**Q:** What sticks out in your mind about that show?

**A:** It was a pretty intense process. That was right towards the end of us touring and we got offered this show, and it's such a prestigious venue and not a lot of bands get offered that, so we just were ecstatic to be able to play there. Like I said, we wanted to do something really special, so we started working with our producer in this area, Neel Hammond, and he helped us. He orchestrated a lot of new parts to the songs and kind of brought new life to them. He helped it come to fruition. It was a two-month process preparing for it, but it was crazy. We didn't really have any practice with the orchestra until the day before and the day of, but it went swimmingly and it was just a really surreal experience playing that venue and to have a full house and to have an orchestra behind us—it was like nothing I've ever experienced.

**Q:** What are your goals for the band in 2013?

**A:** We're just going to ride it out, and hopefully with the new record, people get excited about it, and we're just going to keep doing what we're doing. That's all we really want. If we can, keep touring and when we're done with touring, make another record; that would be amazing.



*OUR FAVORITE:*

MAE

WHITMAN



THE  
**PARENTHOOD**  
ACTRESS IS TRULY  
ONE OF TV'S BEST.

BY MERLYN HAMILTON



Ever watched television and wondered if the actors were as down-to-earth in real life as they were on-screen? There's no doubt that this can be said of NBC's *Parenthood* actress Mae Whitman, who plays the quirky but sweet and strong-willed character, Amber Holt.

A child prodigy, Whitman began her career at the age of three when she wandered into a commercial audition that her mom was at and was immediately noticed for her cute looks.

"I don't know what I thought it was," Whitman says. "I don't know how I knew, but I wanted to try it ... So we gave it a shot and it was a really fun experience. I did my first commercial and it was a fun, nice, supportive environment. I loved it immediately. It felt really natural for me to be on set and then it just kind of kept going from there."

Whitman is known for her role on *Parenthood* as well as on *Arrested Development*. But Whitman has not been limited to television. Her film resume includes *Tinkerbell*, *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World*, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, the classic 90s movie *Independence Day*, and many more.

Whitman says that she doesn't have a preference between television and film because she loves both of them.

"The experience is so different that it's a different part of you," Whitman says. "On TV, especially if you're a regular on something, you have a parking place, you have your family there, you know how it all goes. It's like a comfortable family that you know you're going to get to see. Artistically, it's different from making a movie because you don't know how it's going to end or where it's going to go. With movies, as you're making it, you know where it's going to end up. With TV, you don't. With movies it's great because a lot of times you get to go to a new place and meet all new people and have this sort of almost pressure cooker exciting experience because you're only together for a few months, but you're all creating this project. So you almost create a whole new world for yourself for a little while. For

me, I think it's important to do both because I think it exercises different parts of my acting abilities."

As a regular on *Parenthood*, Whitman says that her role as Amber is probably the best television that she's ever done. As Amber represents the 21- to 22-year-old girl that is trying to find a job, a place to live, and her place in this world, she says that you don't really get to see much of that on television.

"I think it's something that so many people go through," Whitman explains. "I feel like *Parenthood* stays committed to things that have really defined the genuine truth in life's situations. It's kind of comforting because you get to tune in to other people that you've come to love going through these situations you're going through. I watch it and feel comforted by the other family members and the things they're going through. It's so important to me and I love every single person that is a part of it. I mean, from every single person on the crew, to every single person on the cast. We're such a family and we love each other so much and I think that's what makes this show special, that there's this underlying sense of love and connection; it sort of rings through when people are watching it."

So what's Whitman's favorite scene on *Parenthood*? It's hard to tell, she says, because she doesn't have just one.

"There's just so many great scenes," the actress explains. "One of my favorite things about *Parenthood* is that you get a mix, like in real life, of drama with comedy. For me, I love anything where I get to be with Lauren [Graham] and Miles [Heizer], my family, because I love the sort of dynamic that they all have. It's so fun to see into their background and see sort of where they come from and how the kids came to be and what trace they have with [Lauren's character, Sarah]. It's real fun to me, the scene where Sarah comes over to Amber's apartment and is cleaning out the loft and we're like jumping around and screaming. That was so fun to me."

Other favorites of Whitman's include

the car accident scenes and this season, where she's falling in love.

"The beach scene was super fun to shoot," says Whitman. "It was so beautiful. It was so exciting just running and jumping in the ocean, you know, and doing it with Matt [Lauria]. He's just the best. It was really fun."

But as many fans know, *Parenthood* isn't the only television that Whitman is involved in. After six years of being off-air, *Arrested Development* is scheduled to come back in early 2013 for a highly anticipated fourth season, and Whitman is excited to be back as Ann.

"The fact that I'm even involved in it at all is like a real miracle," says Whitman. "I was like, 'What's this going to be like, a new season?' and it is literally unbelievably funny. The very few little things that I've seen been done already on the show are some of the funniest things I've ever seen in my life."

Like most of her co-stars, she's not giving away any spoilers. She admits, however, that there's so much new stuff happening that she doesn't even have a handle on it all, except that she's excited to see the finished product.

What else does this actress have in store for her fans? The release of some new music!

As *Parenthood* fans have seen, Whitman is quite the singer and guitarist, and has been for the past few years, she says. With boyfriend and fellow actor, Landon Pigg, Whitman wrote "Gardenia," which was featured on the NBC series.

"It's funny to me because I have no problem, like, getting up and acting or making a total idiot of myself in front of a camera or on stage, but picking up a guitar is the most vulnerable thing ever for me," she says. "It's hard for me to actually go for it, but having Landon around has really helped me a lot and built my confidence. We're singing on some stuff together and actually running on these roads of trying to get something released."

**To stay updated on Mae Whitman, follow her on Twitter: maebirdwing.**

**"I feel like *Parenthood* stays committed to things that have really defined the genuine truth in life's situations. It's kind of comforting ..."**



VARIANCE

WINTER  
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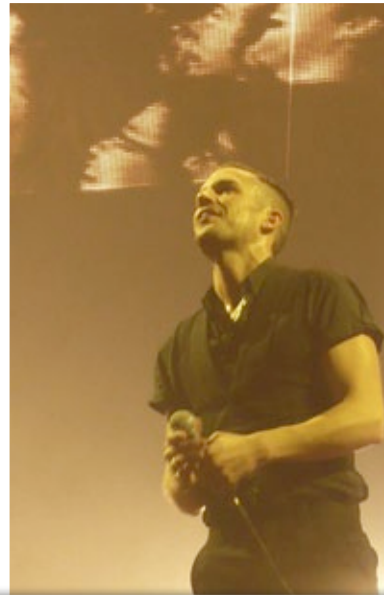




P H O T O  
D I A R I E S







CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT (THIS PAGE): JAY-Z PERFORMING RALLY FOR PRESIDENT OBAMA BY ADAM GLANZMAN; BRANDON FLOWERS OF THE KILLERS IN VANCOUVER, B.C., BY LUAN LI; TWO DOOR CINEMA CLUB'S ALEX TRIMBLE IN BRUSSELS, BELGIUM, BY VINCE KMERON; IMAGINE DRAGONS BACKSTAGE IN BRUSSELS BY LOU LE GUILLOUX; PASSION PIT'S MICHAEL ANGELAKOS BY HUNTER BOONE // (NEXT PAGE): GARY CLARK JR. AT AUSTIN CITY LIMITS FESTIVAL BY NATHAN MALONE; ANDY HULL AND KEVIN DEVINE OF BAD BOOKS AT ACL BY RACHEL FAYLENE; ALT-J AT ACL AND ACL ZILKER PARK ENTRANCE BY JONATHAN ROBLES; THE CIVIL WARS PLAYING FOR THEIR LARGEST AUDIENCE AT ACL AND CANDID SHOT OF THE LUMINEERS AT ACL BY NATHAN MALONE.



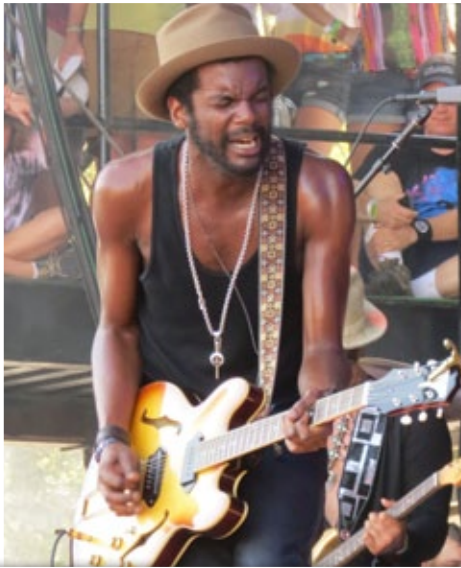


PHOTO  
DIARIES







# ELLIE GOULDING

PERFORMS AT XCEL ENERGY CENTER IN ST. PAUL, MINN.

P H O T O  
D I A R I E S





# MACKLEMORE

SURROUNDED BY SOLD-OUT CROWD IN STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN





# Big Gigantic

BY AMANDA MORAD

ALL THE DREAMY SYNTH LINES.

THE SEXY, SOULFUL JAZZ.

THE HEART POUNDING BASS TONES.

→→ NOW BIG GIGANTIC LOOKS AHEAD.





It's a snowy afternoon in Boulder, Colo., and Dominic Lalli watches the snow fall as he chats with Variance about Big Gigantic—the livetronica duo he founded with college buddy and drummer Jeremy Salken. Here, Dom and V chat about the live ex-

perience, nonstop touring, and ditching the label scene.

Since Big Gigantic's inception in 2008, the saxophonist-turned-producer and his roommate-turned-bandmate have turned the world of electronic music on its ear. Really, who would think to put a saxophone on stage with a drum set and then have a rave? That's the Big Gigantic experience.

"We want to make it the best night possible for fans," Lalli says. "Audio, visual, down to the staff and security guards—we definitely want to put on a full experience."

From the opener to the encore, Lalli mixes tunes that tell an emotional "story" for fans with a beginning, middle and end. "I just try to mix things in well, remixing our original songs and remixes," he explains. "But the bottom line is we're just trying to throw a party and have a good time."

Throughout a show, Lalli and Salken run the gamut of tunes. A live show is like sampling the whole EDM aisle, Lalli says, with no electronic genre or subgenre left behind. Fans will hear Big Gigantic's earliest mixes up to their current project, *Nocturnal*.

"I wanted to make this something that I really love," Lalli says of *Nocturnal*. "I spent a bunch of time on it and there are really a lot of different sounds. That may be part of the reason it's remained so popular among fans." Though the record released in January 2012, fans are still eating it up like it hit airwaves yesterday.

"There's not a single lyric, but a lot of feeling that people can relate to in their everyday lives," Lalli says. "I'd like to think that some of those things we feel are coming across and that's why it's kept everyone's attention for so long."

The addictive nature of the album has allowed the duo to stay on the road more than usual this past year. "We did nine straight weeks of touring where we usually do four or five weeks and take a break," Lalli reports. Though the boys keep a full schedule, touring only serves the music, so a careful balance between time on the road and in the studio is key. "We make sure to get a good break to keep making music and get new ideas," Lalli assures us. "If you're always on the road, then you never have time to make any new music, and vice versa."

Big Gigantic started in Boulder, Colo., with a computer and a couple of guys making beats. "Eventually it got to the point where I was like, 'okay, I think I'm ready to start a band and Jeremy is like the perfect guy to do this thing with,'" Lalli recalls. After the first local gig, they did some opening dates for Sound Tribe and FTS9, and then started touring on their own.

The band hit the major festival circuit in 2012, appearing at Bonnaroo, Lollapalooza, Outside Lands, Ultra, Baselight and others. But they haven't lost their appreciation for audiences of all sizes. "Every experience is different. There's nothing like playing a big outdoor festival with thousands of people out in the open air," Lalli reminisces. "There's also nothing like playing a really small, sweaty club because you're right there with everyone and you know, sometimes s--- gets crazy!"

Okay, playing live music anywhere is fun. But why livetronica? A quick glance at Dominic and Jeremy's bios reveals music degrees, classical training, and a long list of instruments either or both of them play. It's not like two friends patched together seemingly unrelated musical skills to create a band and it just happened to sound amazing. No, this was an intentional decision to mix the emotional power of live music with the thrill and verve of electronic mixing.

One of the biggest benefits of doing music this way is taking advantage of the DIY trends in the music industry and leaving the pursuit of major label signage behind. "The way it's going right now, it just makes the most sense," Lalli says. "Labels nowadays are a group of people with a similar sound that everyone's reaching for it and they decide, let's all of us just do this together."

A byproduct of this independent mentality is free music. Their latest album, along with all of Big Gigantic's projects, is available for free via their website.

"Our reasoning behind it is that we just want everyone to have it," Lalli says. "We figured that was the greatest way to get our music out to people. And we just put it everywhere. iTunes, Amazon, Pandora, our website, music blogs—we don't care how fans get it as long as they get it."

But that doesn't mean fans aren't still shell-ing out. "It's like this crazy phenomenon that you put your music out there for free and people still support it," Lalli observes. "That's really cool. When we put out *Nocturnal*, we didn't really advertise iTunes. Sure, we put it up on the release date, but we focused on releasing it for free on our website."

To his surprise, *Nocturnal* hit No.2 in electronic releases that day. And as Lalli and Salken continue to create the complete livetronica experience, fans can only expect their next release to camp out at No. 1.

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**Big Gigantic's tour schedule and free music collection are available at [biggigantic.net](http://biggigantic.net).**



## THIS ALT-ROCK OUTFIT IS BACK. AND THEY MEAN BUSINESS.

**F**or many bands, getting the right group of people together at the right time is easier said than done. It sometimes takes a number of changes for a band to become a cohesive unit that all members can be proud to be a part of. For Welsh-born rockers Ritzy Bryan and Rhydian Dafydd, this rings especially true. Bassist Rhydian Dafydd took time off tour to catch us up on what's happening in the lives of up-and-coming alt rock group, The Joy Formidable.

A story that started in North Wales when lead vocalist Ritzy Bryan and Dafydd were still in grade school has become a career and, quite possibly, a life-long journey in music.

A logical first act to this story would be that these two friends started making music together at a tender young age, but the truth is far from that. "Oddly enough we had kind of separate, parallel musical paths," explains Dafydd. "We didn't actually cross in terms of writing together or anything like that until we left university."

While Dafydd was working on a project with his band in Manchester years ago, they began looking for a guitarist and Bryan came to mind: "I asked 'Do you fancy playing guitar?'" And thus, the two were brought together once more.

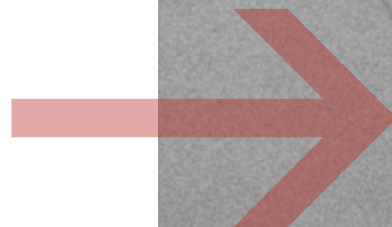
The dynamic of a group doesn't always mesh well, and after playing together for a couple years, they decided they were unhappy. "We had problems in the band; we just really got fed up by the end, so we went back home to North Wales...and that was the first time we actually started writing together," says Dafydd.

The writing collaboration of the two was just the right recipe for the type of music they both enjoyed creating. "We stand behind everything we write," says Dafydd. "It's a constant journey that we enjoy."

With the addition of Matt Thomas on drums, the story of The Joy Formidable begins.

Riding on great success from the band's debut album, many fans are looking forward to their sophomore record, *Wolf's Law*, set to release this month. With a new record comes the question of expectations. Dafydd promises some new sounds, but says that fans will know what to expect from them from the beginning and that they won't disappoint. "They're different beasts [the two albums], but as I say, we very much feel like it's the same voice."

With the amount of touring the band has done this past year, they have to find time to write in every type of situation. "We're








THE  
JOY  
FORMIDABLE

BY EMILY HULSEBERG





“WHEN YOU SET GOALS YEARS AHEAD, IT SOMEHOW BECOMES A BIT TOO MUCH OF A BUSINESS.”

always getting ideas down,” Dafydd says. “We don’t treat it like a job; I think it’s a lifestyle. You live and breathe it. We’re always writing on the road.”

The band was able to take a month hiatus from the road last January to head to the mountains to record. “[We were] in a log cabin in the middle of nowhere with six-foot snow sometimes surrounding us, but it was bliss.”

Even with hectic schedules, Dafydd stresses that he doesn’t see their career as a job. “What keeps us going is the fact that we’re writing something that means something to us, and when you then see it connecting with people, it’s a really special thing. So as long as we feel like we’re always growing as artists, growing

as people, we’ll absolutely keep doing it. We love what we do.”

That passion is evident in the live show experience. The energy amongst the band is that of “giddiness,” says Dafydd. “We always have a laugh. I think we never take any moment for granted. We’re just very excited about pretty much any show that we do.”

A big obstacle for European bands is often breaking into American markets. When Joy Formidable started touring in the U.S., they found that fans really responded to their music. “I feel like, with this band, that the way people have digested the music has been in the right way, which is not being pushed on people so much,” Dafydd explains. Fans

were able to get to know this band on a more personal level.

“People are actually talking, word of mouth, coming to shows, so the people at the shows actually want to be there,” he says.

Without people hyping the band up, they were able to create a genuine fanbase in the U.S. that is sure to follow them for albums to come.

The band’s inspiration comes from all sorts of places, including their connection with nature, connection with each other, and relationships. “Mortality, for instance, seeped into this record a lot because we had quite a difficult time with the first record,” Dafydd reveals. “There was definitely some healing that





needed to be done in our personal lives and it finally feels like those issues are resolving a bit.”

With resolved issues, the band was able to put out an album they can be proud of. “The time is now, and you can actually change the future if you want to,” Dafydd contends. “That’s overall been quite a big theme running throughout the album, but there’s other offshoots of that general theme as well; it’s not one-dimensional.”

With the future comes expectations and goals the band has for their journey, but for the most part they take it one day at a time. “If you can stand behind what you’ve written, have no regrets, then that’s the key thing,” Dafydd says. “When you

set goals years ahead, it somehow becomes a bit too much of a business.”

The success of the band has come from the right group of people coming together to make music they feel communicates exactly what they want, and by sticking to what they set out to do—make music they care about and that other people care about too.

“That’s what’s heartwarming to us when we do write songs that mean so much to us, and again, connects with people,” says Dafydd. “I think, ultimately, success is being able to be yourself and sustain the band because I tell you what, that isn’t an easy thing.”

With a band comes relationships and with any good relationship comes work.

But pairing it with a job that doesn’t seem like work makes the perfect combination for a band that is set up to have great, relevant records for years to come.

“We’re not just spectators in this bubble so there’s real life that always throws us constant aggravations and inspirations at the same time,” Dafydd says. “All that relevance obviously comes from that; there’s always a tomorrow.”

“The beautiful thing about music, oddly enough, is that there is no wrong or right way,” he concludes. “People have had such different paths to achieving this thing we call success.”

***Wolf’s Law* is set to release in the U.S. on Jan. 22.**





# KIMBRA

BY JONATHAN ROBLES





# THE DUCHESS

## OF INDIE POP TALKS ABOUT THE FUTURE

**KIMBRA** is coming off one of the most extraordinary years of her career. She released her highly acclaimed album *Vows*—one of *Variance* readers' top 25 albums of 2012—in the U.S.; she toured the world in support of that album; and her multi-platinum collaboration with Gotye “Somebody That I Used to Know,” the top-selling song of last year, is now up for two Grammys, including Record of the Year.

At 22, Kimbra Lee Johnson may appear to be at the mountaintop, but the new duchess of indie pop has the world ahead of her yet.

“You hear a lot of people talk about moments,” says the young singer, enjoying a sunny afternoon before taking the stage at Austin City Limits Festival. “‘This is your moment.’ I don’t know about that. It’s interesting because you have all these voices, and everyone offers their opinion. Of course, you seek out wisdom, but it’s crucial to stay true to your vision. My manager and my band—I’m very close with my band, and they’re very supportive.”

Although still riding a wave of success from 2012, Johnson is already looking ahead. “I’m starting to get into the second record, and I’ve already got a few sketches delivered.

I’ve met so many incredible people over the last couple of years. I’ve been talking about collaborations through email, but there’s only so much you can do when you’re playing shows.”

Those shows have become something of a trademark for the New Zealander, whose energetic, jazz-inspired electropop envelopes intimate venues and large festival stages alike with ear-pleasing melodies and delectable synth layers.

“[‘Somebody’] was different,” says Johnson of her chart-topping effort with Gotye. “It showed a different side, a different ability for me, and people liked it. Would I want to try something more stripped down on the next record? I don’t know. I don’t want to make a whole record of it, but maybe a song. I know you would think there is a lot of pressure, but I don’t want to copy anything. If I’m staying true to myself as an artist, then I need to just create simply for the sake of creating. My vision is to move forward with each record, not duplicate.”

The songs Johnson creates have resonated with both fans and critics. Even before her stake-claiming turn on that juggernaut tune with Gotye, her star was on the rise. Indie pop music lovers were well aware of that lustrous voice, her modern take on the soulful sounds of old and the jittery electro slow jams.

Long before she and Gotye were the music industry’s new faces of success, she was a self-proclaimed “fan girl” covering his songs in bars across Australia. Now, she’s a Grammy nominee. “I haven’t really thought about it actually,” she confesses. “It’s crazy to think that it could be a possibility to even be up for a Grammy ... When I first heard the track, I had a feeling it would really resonate with people because it had this brutal honesty about it. In terms of seeing it go to No. 1 around the world, that’s not something I ever could have expected, especially because it’s a song that defies a lot of Top 40 formulas.”

Johnson is certainly no stranger to defying “formulas.” And while the world awaits new music from the talented songstress, she’s willing to make them wait until she has something worth sharing. “All of this has taught me something. There’s always going to be people that want to put a deadline on [your music], but you can’t force the creative process. When you do things right, that’s when these good things happen.”

And it seems the good will only keep happening. “Somebody” is a heavy favorite to win at least one of its categories, and that certainly comes as no surprise. A followup to *Vows*, however, may be further down the line, but it will be worth the wait.

GRAMMY WATCH NEXT PAGE →



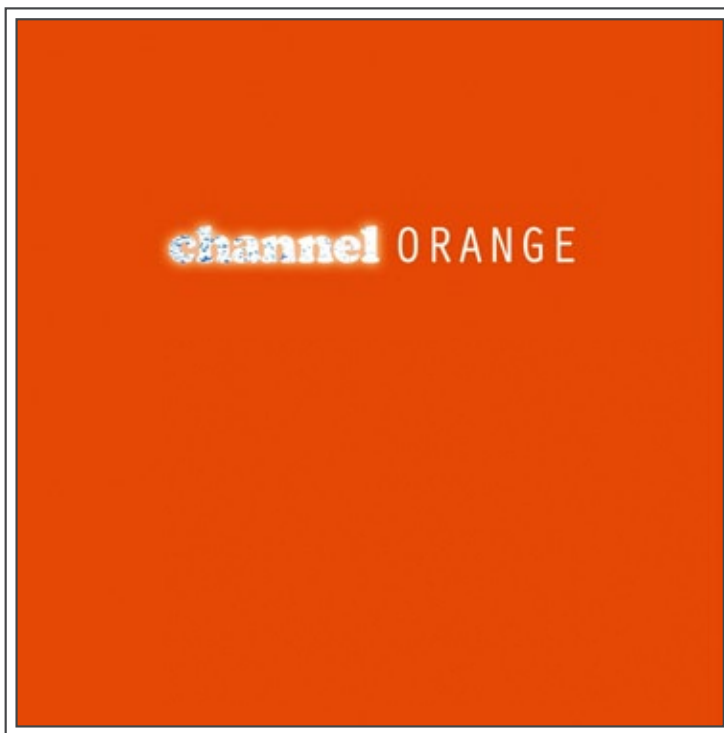


"THE GRAMMYS ARE LIKE THE CHAMPIONSHIP, AND THAT'S COOL."

# → GRAMMY WATCH

BY RACHEL FAYLENE, JONATHAN ROBLES AND EDWIN WILSON

## > JUST THINKIN BOUT FRANK OCEAN



Man of the hour, Frank Ocean, is more than qualified to walk away with Album of the Year at the 55th Annual Grammys. Not only does Ocean have an impressive resumé of artistic works that prove his worth in the industry, but he also carries a substantial amount of truth and storytelling.

*Channel Orange* opened doors that fans didn't expect to walk through. A saga unfolded, giving the world a chance to truly view him as he was; not just as a songwriter, or every woman's infatuation, or even an as an Odd Future member—but simply as Frank Ocean.

Originally intended for the sleeve of *Channel*

*Orange*, Ocean released his truly captivating love letter via Tumblr that enabled him to free his mind and stop rumors in their tracks. The events mentioned in the letter helped Ocean become a well-rounded songwriter, creating art that derived from pain and experience. He explains the process to have changed entirely saying, "It became effortless, like breathing. Because now I have something I really need to say...It was a floodgate. It opened up the works."

Releasing confirmation of his deepest feelings alongside his new album has made 2012 a historic year for Ocean. Now up for six nominations, the dedicated work and self-expression of

this dynamic protagonist proves worthy of respect. Ocean expresses his gratitude by stating, "Of course awards matter. It's like a player in any ball league... the Grammys are like the championship, and that's cool. It's cool to be recognized by your peers."

Ocean is in great company for Album of the Year—standing next to other great artists such as The Black Keys, fun., Mumford & Sons and Jack White. And while we admire everyone in the running, our sights are set on Ocean walking away a very happy man. Congratulations, Frank Ocean, on your many successes and your achievements to come. We're rooting for you.

→

FRESH  
FACES &  
INDIE  
FAVES  
LEAD THE  
WAY IN  
THIS YEAR'S  
NOMINEES





Another shiny new gem in this year's Grammy nominations is fun., a band whose meteoric rise over the last 12 months cannot be ignored. And voters took note, giving them six nominations.

Although Album of the Year may be out of reach for the pop-rock trio, it's highly unlikely the Nate Ruess-fronted act goes home empty-handed. Is fun. the next Beatles? Probably not. But in a year in which newbies and indies reigned the charts, fun. led the charge—with No. 1 song “We Are Young,” featuring Janelle Monae, a top candidate for Record (awarded to the recording artist) and Song (to the songwriter) of the Year. In each category, fun.'s greatest competition comes from Gotye's “Somebody That I Used to Know” and Carly Rae Jepsen's “Call Me Maybe,” respectively. And while Kelly Clarkson might have Pop Vocal Album in the bag, fun.'s *Some Nights* might be a dark horse.

Mumford & Sons are also up for six nods, and we love us some *Babel*, but we predict this year's Grammy ceremony to be a coronation night for either fun. or Frank Ocean—or both.

It's apparent that first-timers have the upper hand, but a win would be extra special for Ruess, after more than 12 years trudging through this industry with little recognition. A star example of persistence, the frontman joked upon receiving the nominations: “We want them all.”



PHOTOS, THIS PAGE: FUN. BY SPORKMCGEE; ALABAMA SHAKES BY PIETER M. VAN HATTEM

## ← FUN.

Every year, Grammy voters make it a point to show how relevant they are with some under-the-radar nominees. One of this year's more surprising contenders is three-year-old Alabama Shakes, but definitely not because they are undeserving.

Vocalist Brittany Howard is one of the greatest new voices to come along in years, but Alabama Shakes are still the underdogs, up against some stiff competition in two of three categories. For Best New Artist, The Lumineers and fun. are the probable frontrunners. In the race for Best Rock Performance, Alabama Shakes have the lowest name recognition versus The Black Keys, Bruce Springsteen, Coldplay and Mumford & Sons.

## ALABAMA SHAKES

At any rate, this is a win-win. Regardless of the outcome in February, the Grammys get indie cred and Alabama Shakes get a huge stamp of approval from a very competitive music industry. Win or lose, voters have already spoken in the form of nominations: This band is here to stay.

“I'm just happy [that] my Nanna's happy,” Howard said following the nominations. “If I was on the other side of the fence, I'd vote for Frank Ocean, personally,” drummer Steve Johnson added.

Even if Alabama Shakes don't nab gold this year, it's likely only the first of many nominations to come. If they do, in fact, prove victorious, they earned it. This band has reason to celebrate either way.

# → GRAMMY WATCH

PHOTOS, THIS PAGE: MARCUS MUMFORD BY ART HEFFRON; GOTYE BY CYBELE MALINOWSKI



## MUMFORD & SONS

Mumford & Sons sure seem unstoppable. After massive success in 2010 and 2011, the British folk-rockers returned last year with the second-highest debut of 2012. Bested only by Taylor Swift's *Red*, sophomore LP *Babel* broke multiple records and helped the band tie for most Grammy nominations along with Frank Ocean, fun., Kanye West, Jay-Z and The Black Keys.

*Babel* landed at No. 2 on our Top 25 Albums of 2012, but Grammy voters seem intent on rewarding newcomers this round. We could be wrong, but the momentum has swung heavily in favor of Frank Ocean (whose *Channel Orange* snagged our No. 1 Album).

Let's be clear: While the chanc-

es of any Adele-like sweep are slim this year, the band will win something, but it will be tight. Even in the niche genre Americana Album, they face The Lumineers and The Avett Brothers. For Rock Song, they may eke out a win against Bruce Springsteen. As for Album of the Year, we see it coming down to Mumford versus Ocean. While the former sold more, the latter received more critical praise—and that could be the tie-breaker. We'll see!

The band, however, doesn't seem too obsessed with Grammys. "We always want to be just below average," Marcus Mumford said of maintaining ticket prices the night of the nominations, joking. "Yeah, that's how we approach albums!"

## → GOTYE

Wally De Backer (aka Gotye) is one of the year's greatest breakout stars. His single "Somebody That I Used to Know," featuring Kimbra, was propelled by YouTube into a global chart-topper. It quickly outshined a litany of bubblegum pop music and became the top-selling song of 2012.

"I think a large group of people are sick of the highly sexualized, auto-tuned pop or really heavy R&B that has defined the American pop landscape," De Backer told *Variance* just before claiming the No. 1 spot in the States.

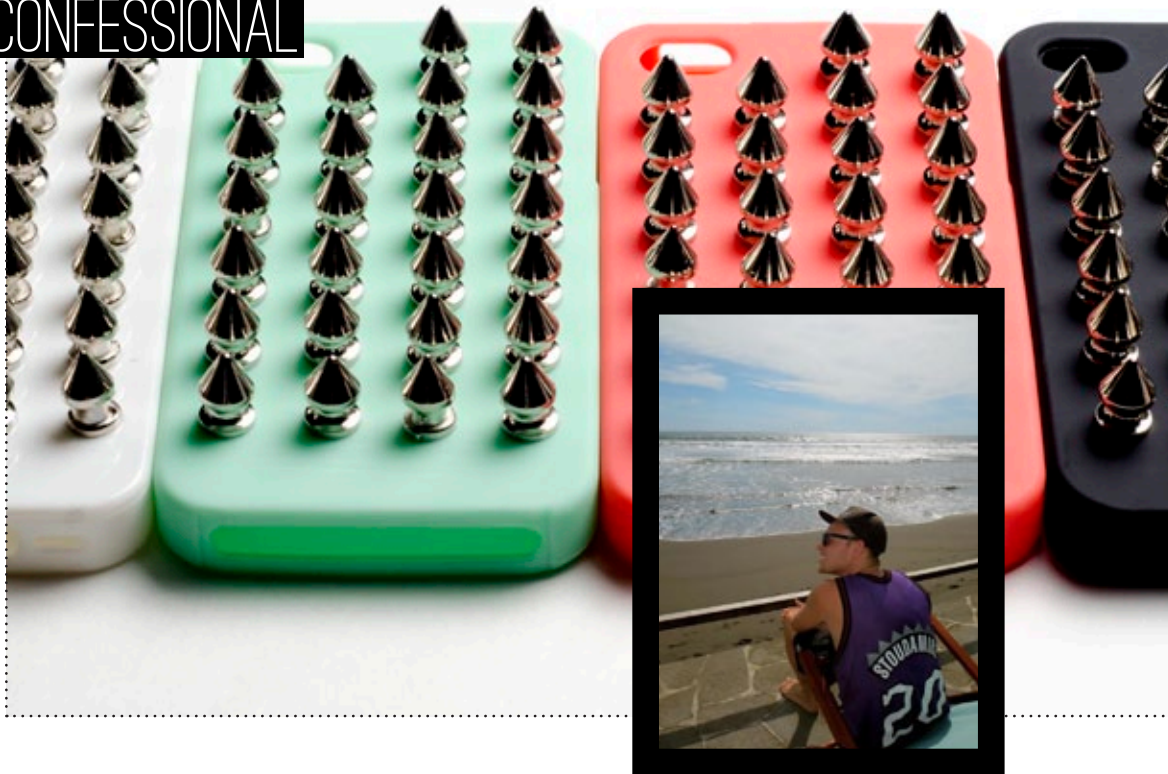
Here's the tricky part: "Somebody" was inescapable for most of 2012 and De Backer's nominations were a no-brainer, but he is in a tight race in all three of his categories. His best shot is for Record of the Year, where he'll face fun. and Taylor Swift.

He and Kimbra are also up for Best Pop Duo/Group Performance versus fun. and Janelle Monae; his album *Making Mirrors* competes against Fiona Apple and M83 for Best Alternative Album.

Who will De Backer be watching, though? "I really love Frank Ocean's work," he said of fellow Record of the Year nominee. "He's got an incredible voice and he's a really interesting songwriter. On the more pop end of the spectrum, the first time I heard Taylor Swift's 'We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together' I thought it was one of the most killer pop songs I've ever heard."



## ARTIST CONFESSIONAL



ANDREW MOORE  
FOUNDER, FELONY CASE

**M**y name is Andrew Moore. I just turned 25 and I'm the founder of Felony Case. It's only me here, so I do everything, from sourcing products, to customer support and marketing. I still make every case by hand—that's love.

I got the initial concept for Felony Case from a tweet I read back in March 2012. A girl I follow tweeted a photo of a girl holding a spiked iPhone case and said, "I NEED THIS, does anyone know where I can buy one?" I replied to her saying she should make one herself. I woke up the next morning and I guess had some sort of epiphany in my sleep—I tweeted her back saying, "Give me a couple weeks and I'll have one for you."

I went on eBay and bought a couple of different cases and some spikes. A few days later I left for Miami with a few friends. While we were there, we ran (stumbled) into a super eclectic-looking girl at a bar. She was wearing a bullet shell belt, crazy high boots, and her hair was dyed more colors than I could count at the time. She introduced herself saying her name was, "Melanie, but my friends call me Felony." That word sort of stuck with me, and I

like double entendres, so I ran with it.

I started telling friends about it before I got my order from eBay. Their reactions were positive for the most part, but I felt like not a lot of people took me seriously. Felony Case has come a long way since those first cases. They're a little embarrassing to look back at now, but good because it shows how far I've come.

There have been small challenges along the way. For example, the spikes would unscrew and fall off on the first few cases I sold. I fixed this by using Loctite (which is a chemical that bonds to the spike so it doesn't come off) on all the screws. Another problem was the color would rub off of the gold spikes at the beginning. I worked closely with the factory that makes them to develop a special coating so this wouldn't happen anymore.

This whole grunge phase happening right now in fashion is super interesting. Spikes are being put on everything these days; it's great that they have such a vast appeal. I've sold cases to everyone from high school girls to fashion moguls, UFC fighters to porn stars.

With the release of the iPhone 5 came

pros and cons. It's good because everyone who had a Felony Case on their 4 now needs one for their 5; however, it took a lot longer than I would have liked to get the iPhone 5 cases available for sale. Running a business has really opened my eyes to everything happening behind the scenes that no one knows about. I probably went through 50 different iPhone 5 case samples before finding one that I liked enough to put my mark on and give it the Felony Case treatment.

While Apple is notorious for updating product frequently, I can deal with semi-annual and annual releases, but I don't do cases for Android because I can't keep up. I feel like there's a new Android device every week. I learned from my delay for the iPhone 5 release and now I'm ready for the next one.

My best advice to someone inspired by my story? Set goals for yourself, and don't stop.

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**Check out Felony Case products at: [felonycase.com](http://felonycase.com).**

▲ FELONY CASE



*AVAILABLE FOR iPhone 4/4S & iPhone 5*

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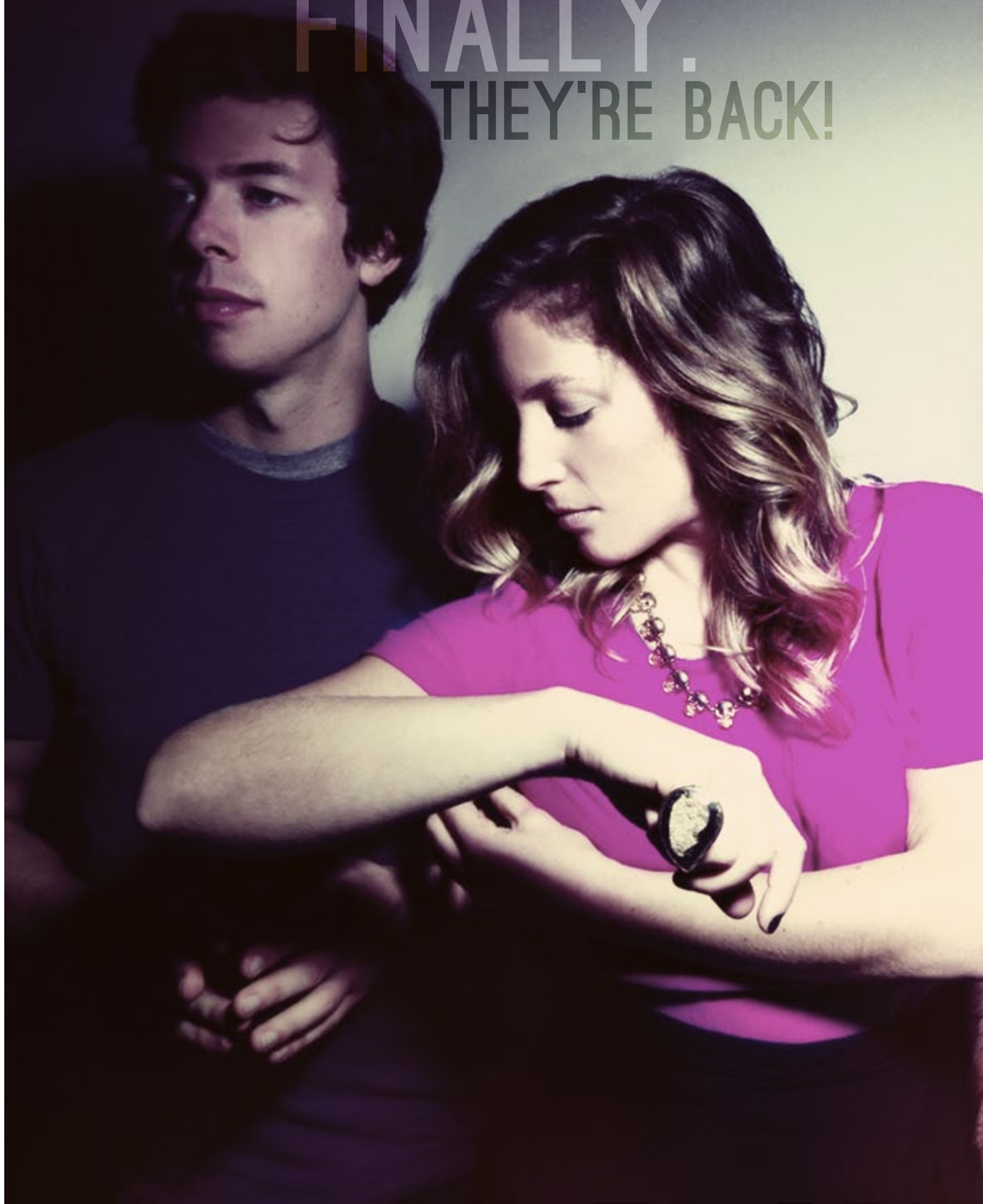
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VARI  
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PG.  
34

FINALLY.  
THEY'RE BACK!





RARARIOT

BY AMANDA MORAD



New Years is a time for change. Most people reflect on what they should or could have done differently in the past and resolve to be better versions of themselves in the future. For Syracuse-based band Ra Ra Riot, all of 2012 was about change. Founding member and bassist Mathieu Santos talks with Variance about changing members, changing sounds, and changing outlooks for their new album release, *Beta Love*, due out Jan. 22.

When Alexandra Lawn and her cello parted ways with the band in February, the band knew more than their stage presence had to change. Swapping strings for synth, they went into the studio to start work on *Beta Love* as a four-piece band for the first time ever.

"The whole approach we took this time around was just one of being open and trusting our producer with trying to accomplish new and exciting things for us," Santos explains. "I think that attitude sort of added to the whole recording session. The whole album-making cycle was really fun for us—to get pushed outside of our collective comfort zone and try a lot of new things in the studio."

What they have to show for all the change 2012 brought is a synthy pop album that belongs on anybody's party playlist. Ironically, Santos describes it as a "back to basics" project that reunites the group with its roots while helping it embrace the new evolution in its history.

"In some ways *Beta Love* is pretty different from past projects," Santos says. "The songs are shorter and more precise. The arrangements

are a lot sparser. But, you know, we always try to do something different each record to keep ourselves excited and interested and to try new things all the time. It helps us grow."

Mission accomplished with *Beta Love*. Instead of strings taking center stage, Miles' vocals are featured more prominently than in previous works, which plays nicely against the more electric arrangements.

"When we made this record, we were talking a lot about getting back to our roots, back when we started and made our first record, *The Rhumb Line*," Santos reveals. "That record had a lot of immediacy to it, and we developed all of those songs in live settings when we were first starting, in house parties and such. We felt like the old approach is more geared to playing these really energetic, fun live shows and we felt that maybe we got a little bit off of that track with our last record—that it was a little bit too self-conscious or a bit too over-thought in some ways.

"Making this record, we wanted to embrace some of the attitudes that we had early on of just being open, going with our gut a little bit more, trying to have fun and not over think things too much."

*Beta Love* is a compilation of what Santos calls "classic" Ra Ra Riot sounds and their venture deeper into the world of electronic music.

"A lot of the arrangement sort of dances around the central synth backbone," Santos elaborates. "A couple of songs are completely electronic—program drums, synth bass and everything. That was really exciting for us, too, to embrace whatever creative instincts we were having at the moment and just following them to see where they led us."

*Beta Love's* release will mark Ra Ra Riot's third LP on Barsuk Records, an independent label out of Seattle started and managed by members of The Busy Monster. "They have just been absolutely amazing from the beginning," Santos says, singing the small label's praises. "They're a label that we liked and respected to begin with. We know everyone there by name and it's like a family feeling."

The band originally signed with V2 Records, but the label was quickly bought by Universal and was only able to eke out one release for the band, their 2007 self-titled EP. Luckily for Ra Ra Riot, they knew just where to turn.

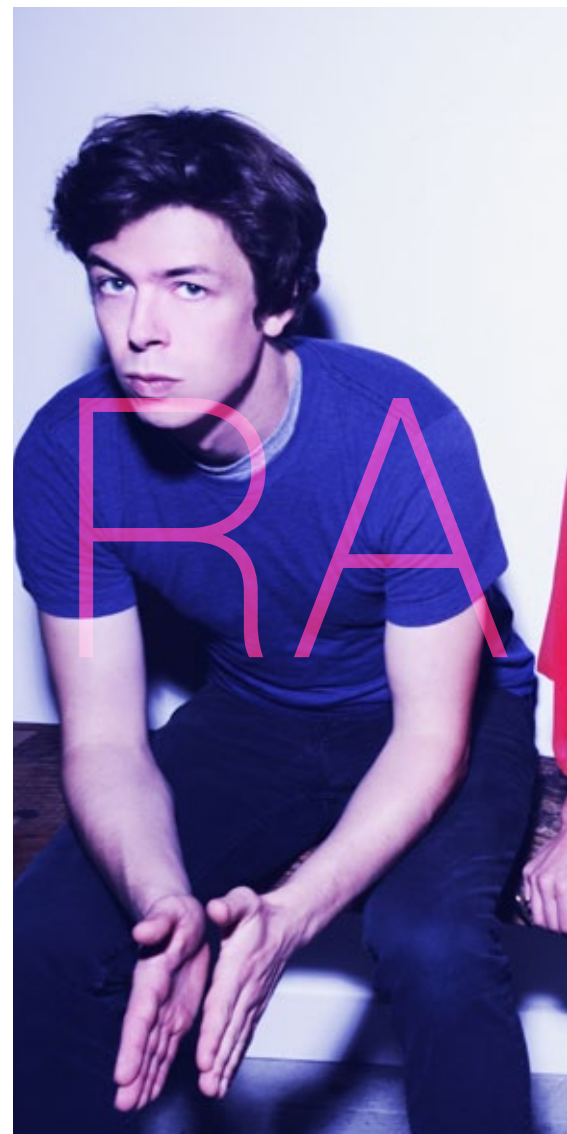
"Barsuk has been very supportive and really have been helping us along as a band to grow more than we thought we would be able to," Santos acknowledges. "We love Barsuk."

Being with a small indie label does place more responsibility on the band to reach out to fans, but Ra Ra Riot has mastered the art of connection.

"We were really lucky," Santos recalls. "Right when we first started as a band basically coincided to the week with Myspace's rise and then Myspace became the measuring stick for bands. So Myspace helped us out early on, and ever since then, we knew the Internet was always going to be an important part of our interaction with people."

The band now manages Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr and Facebook accounts to give fans up-to-the-minute feedback and updates.

Santos notes how different the relationship between bands and fans is now from the way it was a decade ago. "Just for people to feel they can send you a message just like they send any of their friends a message and get a response back within a cou-



ple of minutes is a really cool thing," he says. "I can't imagine when I was younger and really into music being able to have that kind of connectivity with bands I liked. It's really an important thing and you can see it make a difference."

This fall, the band found an innovative way to stay connected with their hometown fans in particular. The band spent a week at their alma mater, Syracuse University, teaching classes for a music residency. From the other side of the lectern, Santos admits, it's a whole new ball game.

"It was pretty wild," he says. "I think at first we were all really apprehensive about it and felt none of us were qualified to teach students. Eventually, we came around and we just figured it wasn't about being qualified as much as it was about going back to where we had our beginnings and giving something back to the community



PHOTOS BY SHERVIN LAINEZ

that gave us our start.”

Assistant Professor Dave Rezak helped the band put together the curriculum and matched them up with courses they were best suited to teach. Miles and Santos taught a songwriting class while guitarist Milo Bonacci and sound engineer Andrew Maury led recording workshops and violinist Rebecca Zeller taught a classical strings symposium. Together, the band lectured on how to navigate the music industry.

“Once we all got into the classrooms, we all said the same thing: we were really nervous up to the minute we started talking and then it just became really fun,” Santos says. “You could tell the students were really interested

and it was a change of pace for them to have something going on in class that was more exciting to them and gave an example of where a music education could take them. It was really, really fun. We all had a great time, and by the end of the week, we were talking about doing it again maybe next year or in a couple of years.”

This long-term thinking is part of what’s made the band so resilient to change and has ensured their longevity since they formed seven years ago. But it wasn’t always this way.

“When we first formed, most everyone in the band was a senior and we formed in January [of our senior year], so we were supposed to be together for that semester,” Santos explains. “It was just like,

we’re graduating, and we want something fun to do for the semester. Let’s get a band together and play at some house parties. So that was literally the extent of our ambition for the band.”

Fate, it would seem, had other plans, Santos recalls: “We got some level of notoriety on campus and we just ended up playing all these shows the whole semester and we were having a ton of fun. So that summer, we booked a small tour ourselves. We just said, ‘that was fun; let’s keep it going a little bit.’

“That tour went well, and then we just slowly started thinking maybe we can actually do something with this and take it more seriously. Before we knew it, we were

playing at CMJ, we’re meeting real industry people and we had a lawyer, and then we had a booking agent. We became a real band.

“The funny thing too is that none of us were friends beforehand, which I think is kind of weird because most bands are friends first and then they form a band, but most of us were basic acquaintances and we sort of all met each other at the first practice. We got along so well, it was surprising. But yeah, we just feel really lucky.”

If only we all could stumble upon our destiny so easily.

**Beta Love releases Jan. 22. Check out the band’s winter tour dates at [rarriot.com](http://rarriot.com).**





## future sounds

It has been quite the journey since Youngblood Hawke's habitation at The Satellite in Los Angeles, where renowned bands such as the Foo Fighters and Foster The People have gotten their start in the music business. After a 2011 break with Iglu & Hartly, Simon Katz and Sam Martin formed Youngblood Hawke with three of their longtime friends. It's been over a year now, and during that brief time, this high-energy indie rock band has seen their music featured in TV commercials and video games, slowly

catching the ears of music lovers.

Each track off their latest self-titled EP with Republic Records showcases their talent for creating high-spirited vocals and sounds that capture a sort of "revolution"-starting atmosphere. The use of a children's choir also helps give the band its sensational aura. *Youngblood Hawke* also sneaked into the Billboard's 200 albums chart for a week in September, as well as the Heatseekers Albums chart during that same time.

Their first single, "We Come Running," has recently begun to receive airplay around the country, even

nabbing a "Single of the Week" nod on iTunes. The song's music video has simultaneously been racking up views on YouTube, obviously by people who don't have a phobia of sharks (consider yourself warned). The immense popularity of "We Come Running" has also launched remixes from well-known producers such as Tiesto and Vicetone.

As of now, the band is on tour, currently making their way across the U.S. opening for Keane. It's inevitable that there is far more to come from Youngblood Hawke, and that's definitely a good thing.

## YOUNGBLOOD HAWKE

LOS ANGELES, CA  
YOUNGBLOODHAWKE.COM



## THE SOUNDS YOU NEED TO HEAR



SEASFIRE

BRISTOL, ENGLAND  
FACEBOOK.COM/SEASFIRE

Hailing from Bristol, England, are four college friends: Josh Thorn (vocals), James Sinclair (drums, electronics), Joe Labanowski (piano, electronics, synths, vocals) and David Callaby (guitars, vocals), who have created the enchanting sound known as Seasfire. This young group formed in a bedroom using semi-old studio equipment and frail electronic devices. Their shared influences of Buckley, BunnyMen, and Burial helped gather their similar desires to put out their own sound.

Having only been together for a little over a year, Seasfire has gained some

momentum through London's premiere radio station XFM with their debut single, "Falling." The extensive plays this vocals-and-keys-driven track led to an impassioned union of fans wanting more of Seasfire's edgy and majestic sounds.

After performing on the BBC Introducing stage, they were hailed as one of the top six acts to see by Radio 1. With fans supporting the group's efforts, the guys kept working and started molding their new EP *We Will Wake*, which released on Dec. 3.

The single "We Will Wake" engulfs the ear from the beginning with a rhythmic jolt as Thorn's satin vocals put the

listener on cloud nine the whole way through. Sinclair and Labanowski's talent on electronics produces an animated sound that is light but still able to grasp emotional senses.

Seasfire's sound seems to leave a lasting impression on whomever experiences it. Their lyrics foretell of past broken relationships and the feeling of hopelessness; grimy tones and vocals help create that picture more clearly.

For more of Seasfire's tracks, as well as remixes, go to [soundcloud.com/seasfire](http://soundcloud.com/seasfire). There is sure to be more to come from these guys throughout the new year.



# THE SOUNDS YOU NEED TO HEAR



## LOWERCASE NOISES

ALBUQUERQUE, NM  
LOWERCASENOISES.COM

Nothing says “brand new year” quite like the impassioned sounds of Lowercase Noises. A one-man act out of Albuquerque, N.M., instrumentalist Andy Othling recently released his *Passage* EP, a five-song set that keeps listeners wanting more.

Othling first debuted Lowercase Noises back in 2009 with the album *Seafront*, and he has released multiple LPs since.

But there’s something very special about this latest quintet of tracks.

Although absent of lyrics, these post-rock ambient tunes are gushing with emotion, telling a complex story with cinematic snares and flickers of Othling’s banjo. The music is bright, energetic and uplifting.

It’s impossible to listen without feeling the accompanying positive embrace. In fact, it might even be impossible to stop

listening. The title track, “Passage,” in particular, is an addicting six minutes of heavenly sounds that make evident the immense potential behind this up-and-coming artist.

Yes, he’s been making music for years. But *Passage* certainly feels like a new beginning—for listener and composer. Everything about it feels right, and it’s clear Lowercase Noises is on the brink of something good this year.



**F**inn Riggins is a trio of graduates from the University of Idaho. Cameron Bouiss, Eric Gilbert, and Lisa Simpson have seen their stature grow ever since the release of their debut album, *A Solider, A Saint, An Ocean Explorer* back in 2007.

Once deemed “one of America’s hardest working bands,” Finn Riggins has performed more than 150 shows a year in 43 states, played on several different support tours in 2009 and 2010 while supporting their sophomore album *Vs Wilderness*, and performed an 80-day tour around the United States in 2010.

But only recently has this group from the oft-overlooked state of Idaho begun earning the attention they deserve.

Known for their quirkiness and energetic shows, the group has established their own approach to music. Experimenting with various genres and buttery vocals, they utilize the organic sounds of toys, odd chanting and bugs, splicing it with experimental tunes like prog-pop, synth-driven indie rock and post-punk, post-epic 70s rock. These elements have aided in setting Finn Riggins apart within the music industry.

The single “Benchwarmers” off

their latest EP showcases their diverse approach with sounds and lyrical methods—blending trip-hop and indie rock, layered with synth sounds. And as the song suggests, listeners may catch themselves starting to “shimmy to the left, shimmy to the right.”

The *Benchwarmers* EP is available now via Tender Loving Empire recording label. For more on the band, go to [finnriggins.com](http://finnriggins.com).



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Year's *Biggest*

INDIE

BREAKOUT

ACT

Now Win  
*A GRAMMY?*

THE LUMINEERS











BY EMILY HULSEBERG AND JONATHAN ROBLES

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JUST OVER A YEAR AGO, The Lumineers—composed of Neyla Pekarek and longtime friends Wesley Schultz and Jeremiah Fraites—were frantically watching an episode of the CW’s *Hart of Dixie*, listening for their first TV placement like little kids waiting for Christmas morning. That night, their future hit “Ho Hey” was introduced for the first time to the American public. But it was only the beginning.

Since then, the band has had one spectacular year, signing a very artist-friendly indie record deal and releasing their self-titled debut album, which has subsequently been certified gold in the U.S. They’ve gone from playing for dozens of fans to touring with the Dave Matthews Band and headlining 4,000-capacity theaters.

Ticket and album sales have exploded, as did downloads for their crazy popular single “Ho Hey,” which went double-platinum last year with more than two million copies sold in the States, also climbing international charts as music lovers the world over discovered the heart-filled lyrics and booming folk-rock sounds of The Lumineers.

Oh, and they’re up for two Grammy awards for Best New Artist and Best Americana Album. No big deal.

It’s been kind of a rollercoaster year for the Denver-based trio, heralded by many as breakthrough indie act of 2012, an example of the ever-growing power of grassroots music. But just as quick as they are to show gratitude for this latest wave of success, they’re also trying to ignore it.

“I always abided by that Bob Dylan quote; I think it was, ‘I don’t read the bad



[press] so I'm not gonna read the good ones.' We have to insulate ourselves from that a little bit," says vocalist-guitarist Schultz. "We don't want to be steered by [Grammys]."

While most of the recent press has focused on all the incredible things going right for the band, nothing about their story is ideal, and perhaps it's all the things that went wrong before that make this moment a little brighter.

Schultz and Fraites originally began making music together as a means of coping with grief. Originally from New Jersey, they made the jump to New York City, but high cost of living and a competitive live music scene became a challenge they couldn't conquer. So they moved to Denver and started over. Little did they know the move would be the catalyst that would change their lives.

"It was a pretty random spot on the map," laughs Pekarek. "[Someone] had placed a Craigslist ad for a cellist, and I answered. And the rest is history I guess."

And just like that, so very 21st century-like, The Lumineers were born.

The band references the struggle leading to this point in the song "Slow It Down," inspired by a night when Schultz's car was broken into and all the thief took was his

E-ZPass (electronic toll road collection). Ironically, the band was robbed again in Los Angeles more than a year ago, this time of their instruments.

"Everybody just lent us instruments," Schultz recalls. "I mean, every city we went to, we had to find a new cello."

Despite the difficulty, Fraites points to the unforeseen symbolism. "The line 'smashed in my car window, didn't touch the stereo,' was kind of this fitting metaphor. You didn't touch the stereo—sort of, you didn't steal the music. When we got instruments stolen in Los Angeles, we drove to the LAPD and then to a house show and played probably one of the best shows we've ever played, on borrowed stuff. And it just reminded us of why we do it." Schultz adds: "There's a beautiful thing about music, where the lyrics can change meaning for you, even as a songwriter."

Change has become quite familiar this past year for the band, as it's been one true constant. When they performed Austin City Limits Music Festival in October, they were assigned to one of the smallest stages at the event, but fans proved festival organizers wrong as thousands gathered chanting lyrics and literally causing an impasse on the grounds

as the crowd stretched beyond capacity. The humble trio was visibly stunned.

"It's still hard to believe," says Fraites of fans' response and growing crowds. "You look up and you think, it's just unreal. It's crazy that it's gotten this big."

Still in disbelief of their many achievements, The Lumineers were in for another shock just weeks ago. Days before the Grammy nomination concert, they were asked to be one of very few televised presenters that night. But it never occurred to them that they would be hearing their own name announced.

"There was a camera in front of where we were sitting right before they announced the Best New Artist nominations," reveals Pekarek. "[The cameraman asked], 'Are you guys The Lumineers? One, two, three? Great. Great! Here we go!'"

Now they find themselves going head-to-head against some of the year's brightest up-and-comers including Alabama Shakes, fun., Hunter Hayes and Frank Ocean for the coveted title of Best New Artist, hoping to join an impressive list of previous award winners Carrie Underwood, Adele, Zac Brown Band and the late Amy Winehouse.



PHOTOS BY: LINDSEY BYRNES (PREVIOUS PAGE); NELS THORESON (THIS PAGE)

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“IT’S KIND OF LIKE WHEN SOMEONE PASSES AWAY AND THEY LEAVE A WILL, AND FAMILY MEMBERS START FIGHTING OVER THINGS THAT THEY NEVER EXPECTED OR HAD. IT WAS NOT ANYTHING WE EVER EXPECTED...”

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The category is always so vast and typically filled with pop singers. But perhaps indicative of the success of roots music and niche genres, the field looks a little different this year. And that’s OK, according to Pekarek. “fun. is an obvious choice; they are kind of all over the place and I think they’re really awesome. Their live performance is really cool ... Really happy to see a band like Alabama Shakes be in that category as well—indie bands in this world that doesn’t always cater to independent music.”

Sure, these artists have all strived for success, and this nod from Grammy voters is certainly part of their musical journey, but for The Lumineers, it wasn’t even on their radar.

“I don’t think it was on any of our minds,” Pekarek explains. “Especially making the record. We weren’t really making it with that in mind at all, so it’s kind of like icing on the cake, you know? It’s not really something you can expect.”

They definitely didn’t have concrete expectations early on, when their breakthrough hit single was just an appetizer at many of their live shows, as Pekarek reveals: “[‘Ho Hey’] was one of those songs when we first started touring that was a great ice breaker, ‘cause we’d often go out in the crowd and we’re yelling these ‘Ho’s and ‘Hey’s, so it’s just one of those things that even if the people didn’t know us or weren’t that interested, they kind of listened whether they liked it or not.”

Based on events since then, it’s safe to say that most liked it. As of this writing, the song is currently sitting at No. 3 in the U.S. and is steadily making its way up to that top spot after weeks of inching up the Billboard charts.

While this whirlwind could easily lead to increased pressure, the band is not making any hasty decisions. “I think we can take our time,” says Fraites. “Luckily, we have really good people who have helped guide us as a band, and they have given us a lot of wisdom. One of the smartest things was just to get into a short-term deal, so we’re not under any time constraints and there isn’t any pressure to put

out another record right away. We can do it completely on our own terms, and that’s important. I think that helps a lot. It’s really hard when you have someone breathing down your neck saying, ‘We need another single. We need the album done.’”

For better or for worse, that means it may be a little while before fans get more music, but it works in the band’s favor. With touring taking up a majority of their time as of late, getting a chance to write and come up with new material for a sophomore album has been hard to come by. “We use sound checks for a lot of experimenting with new songs and things like that,” says Pekarek.

The band will also be taking some time off the month of January to get some new projects into the works, in addition to adding another notch in their belt when they perform on *Saturday Night Live* for the show’s first brand new episode of the year on the 19th. Then it’s back on the road until Grammy week!

Although some shows initially scheduled in February had to be rescheduled due to the upcoming awards ceremony, fans can rest assured that the band will be touring plenty this year. And while much attention has been given to singles and chart success, for a band in its infancy, it’s the ability to quickly sell out dates that still impresses this trio, according to Pekarek: “I think that is definitely where our strength is, the energetic live show. And I don’t know, maybe there is a bit of buzz going around, but we are a live band. Sure, maybe some people are coming because they like the record and I think some are just coming because they have heard a lot of hype, so hopefully we live up to it,” she laughs.

It’s true; while the chart-climbing and rise in sales have definitely been noteworthy, it’s also the rousing live performance this band puts on that has lured thousands of fans, causing word to spread like wildfire. It’s those arena-worthy barnburners, full of blazing banjos and echoing vocals. It’s those impassioned, sultry ballads full of soul and honesty.

Night after the night, the band seemingly pours their heart out onstage for anxious listeners. And the fans—young and old, of all backgrounds—have responded keenly.

Although their first album has done better than any one of them could have hoped for, they are just happy getting to do what they love.

“We’re enjoying everything right now, yes,” says Schultz. “But in the end we’re still focused and taking it all a day at a time.” And Pekarek agrees: “Right now we are really happy to not be working a bunch of side jobs and just being able to make a living as musicians and focus on music. It is a fickle industry so I think we’re all trying not to take anything for granted. Who knows what will happen in the coming years!”

For now, the focus is on the current year, and right now it appears the band will be on the road through at least May, pending any possible changes following the Grammys. But of course, that’s not a driving factor.

“If we win, I don’t want to do anything different,” says Fraites. “And if we lose, I don’t want to feel sad about it. I want to try to maintain a personal kind of barometer or compass and know our own value. If we win, that would be amazing, but if we don’t win, I don’t want to feel like this was all for nothing. It’s been a great year, we still have a great album and we still have a lot more music to write.”

While they agree that talk is cheap, and a lot can change, Pekarek really puts their situation into perspective. “It’s kind of like when someone passes away and they leave a will, and family members start fighting over things that they never expected or had. It was not anything we ever expected or something that we really counted on, so we are really happy that it happened, but we don’t think that’s why we make records, just an added bonus.”

The way Schultz sees it, “Somebody liked us. People like us.” And win or lose, that’s what will determine this band’s future. Ultimately, that’s what matters. And right now, a lot of people all over the planet really, *really* like The Lumineers. ■



## WEBWONDER

# CONOR MAYNARD

BY AARON LACHMAN



Imagine this: You're 19 years old and you've started to get a little attention for the videos you post to YouTube singing popular cover songs. Just like any other day, you post a video of yourself singing Ne-Yo's "Beautiful Monster." Soon, your hits increase dramatically, and one day, you receive a call from a man claiming to be part of Ne-Yo's management team, and your life is changed forever. For Conor Maynard, this isn't a fantasy. It's real life.

The 20-year-old vocalist from Brighton, England, started posting videos to YouTube in 2008, both by himself and with Virginia-based rapper Anthony "Anth" Melo. Maynard never really planned on becoming a singer.

"I went to a drama school part-time for an hour on Saturdays," he says. "[Music] wasn't something I really wanted to do ... it was kind of just like a hobby on the

weekends. For me, it was really acting I enjoyed, I did the singing lessons only because my friends were doing it."

Even though singing was just a hobby, it started to pay off. His first hint of success was when his cover of Usher's "OMG" hit 100,000 views. He says, "The next cover I did was Ne-Yo's 'Beautiful Monster' and from that moment on, it just started to take off, but even though it was blowing up, I still didn't connect the dots between having a bunch of views and being a musician, being a singer. I just thought it was cool that people were watching."

When the fated call from Ne-Yo happened, Maynard thought it was a joke. "It was his management that reached out to me first. I thought my friends down the road put on an American accent and tried to trick me."

To ensure he wasn't being tricked, Maynard asked them to prove they represent-

ed Ne-Yo, and a few days later, he had a Skype session with the man himself. Ne-Yo took Maynard under his wing and started mentoring him, guiding him to a record deal with Parlophone, and seeing his first single, "Can't Say No," rocket to the top of the U.K. charts.

Though comparisons to Justin Bieber seem inevitable—both found success through YouTube, both are young, good looking pop-R&B vocalists—Maynard is his own man. His album *Contrast* debuted at number one on the U.K. Album Chart, and comes out in the U.S. on Jan. 8. The album features collaborations with Ne-Yo, Pharrell, and fellow Brit, Rita Ora. Maynard says he wants *Contrast* to "hit No. 1 in as many countries as possible."

**Connect with Conor Maynard on Twitter: @conormaynard.**

# EAR CANDY

## SPOTLIGHT

ON ARTISTS  
WORTH LISTENING  
TO RIGHT NOW

BY MICHAEL GARCIA

## ELEVEN AFTER



Currently, heavy metal bands don't seem to carry as much buzz as other genres of music. For Topeka-based group Eleven After, they are aiming to bring a different look at both rock and metal genres.

Some of the main influences of the band come from all sorts of metal bands, such as Demon Hunter, which is a Christian metal band, and Metallica, which has forever made its mark on heavy metal music.

When asked about the writing process, lead vocalist and guitarist Brandon Statler explained how differently the inspiration comes to him. "My lyrics come from places I don't even know of sometimes... I write the best lyrics when I'm not thinking about writing lyrics," he said.

Whether it's from previous bands that have paved the way or up-and-coming artists, there are ways to be musically inspired. When it comes to the band's music, there is no "plan B," explains Statler. "Music seems to be the only way to express feelings that you can't explain."

The main focus for Eleven After is to create music about which listeners can say, "This song was written for me, for

the way I feel at this exact moment." A true connection with the audience is a must for them. They want the audience to know that everyone goes through tough life experiences, and through their music, they can express it and hopefully relate to it.

**Their album *Awake and Dreaming* is out now. More information at: [Facebook.com/elevenafterarmy](https://www.facebook.com/elevenafterarmy).**

## CLAYTON PABST



The impact of social media has been the window for many musicians to gain exposure. Young aspiring artists can learn almost everything on their own, and that's exactly what musician Clayton Pabst did.

At age 14, Pabst taught himself how to play piano, but it did take some time to

get the sounds right. Once he was able to put a piece together, he began adding lyrics, and thus his musical path started. Pabst would train himself and began mixing, editing and honing his new-found craft of recording. Now 20, Pabst feels he still has much to learn, but he has been able to produce his first album titled *Starry Nights, Sunny Skies*.

Each track has an inspirational meaning that helps show listeners the rough experiences in life and the positive outcomes with them. "Every song represents my mess of emotions. If it brought out an emotion, chances are it brought out a song," Pabst states.

He hopes to connect with people the same way he felt when creating the song. His desire is to produce music that means something to somebody, during performances or just when his audience sits and listens in their own space.

Being happy with his work is one thing Pabst wants to continue to do. If there is doubt, pain or stress when creating a song, then he feels something is off. "My hope for music is to do it right—enjoying every moment that passes and remembering the best ones," he explains.







WHEREVER YOUR STORY TAKES YOU,  
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# The *Most* UNDERRATED Woman On TV Right Now? **RETTA**

BY RACHEL FAYLENE



***PARKS & RECREATION*** is known for its local government drama and hilarious in-office relations. Creating characters that have grown into their own, this NBC comedy series has had a hand in popularizing the already entertaining cast by bringing some of the background characters to the forefront.

Marietta Sirleaf, better known as Retta, plays the simultaneously straightforward and ambiguous character, Donna Meagle. Identified as the one in control, Donna takes pleasure in telling it how it is, typically with a comedic approach. Sirleaf is very much the character that is Donna Meagle in the sense that her personal humor bleeds into her television character. Years of previous stand-up comedy can be recognized in her *Parks* character.

“I don’t know that I prepare that much but I know that Donna talks a lot less than I do,” she states, discussing the similarities and differences between herself and her character. “She’s a woman of limited words and she makes them count, whereas I feel like I have verbal diarrhea.”

Performing stand-up was first on the list for Sirleaf in her attempt to break into television work. She was a recent graduate of Duke University with medical school in her direct line of vision, until plans changed.

“I had a moment after I graduated from college and I was living alone for the first time and I was watching television and realized that I wanted to act. I wanted to do TV work. Specifically, I thought it would be cool to have my own sitcom,” says Sirleaf.

“I was telling another friend of mine that had actually gone straight into medical school after college about it and she said, ‘Well, why don’t you do stand-up? Don’t all those stand-up comedians get their own show?’ That’s all we knew: people like Roseanne and Tim Allen got their own shows.”

Admitting to being slightly naïve to the idea that her plan would be a swift and easy breakthrough, Sirleaf made the move to Los Angeles where she would pursue pharmaceutical work for a day job and

perform in comedy clubs to get a grasp on the business.

“In the very beginning—I think the second time I went on stage—I went to an open mic and I worked as a chemist; a bunch of the scientists came to see me. It was supposed to be about five minutes, and 45 seconds in, I completely blanked on my material—could not remember one word,” she admits. “I didn’t know how to do audience banter or shoot the s---, if you will. I absolutely blanked and ended my set and they had to go looking for the MC because he was outside smoking thinking he had five minutes, when in fact, he had one.”

Stand-up comedy took an active role in Sirleaf’s life, becoming more than a hobby and more than a stepping stone.

“I was in a place where I had moved to L.A. because of the hopes of picking up television, but I kind of had gotten sucked into comedy, and I say that because it was going well and I was making good money,” confesses Sirleaf. “So when you’re making good money, it’s hard to not do



it. But when you're on the road, you can't be in town for auditions or to do work."

The scheduling between her live shows became more of a priority than looking to land a television or movie role. Actively touring made it difficult for Sirleaf to be both an aspiring actress and a full-time comedienne.

"When the audition

for *Parks* came up, it was during my down time. I wasn't on tour, so I just went in and auditioned. Then I ended up having to cancel a lot of shows that were booked in the next fall," she admits. "But for me, it was worth it because the show might actually last."

Nailing the audition for Donna Meagle left Sirleaf with a chance

to make a somewhat permanent move into acting. Going from being on a stage alone to sharing the screen with some of the funniest faces in comedy comes with its rewards.

"With stand-up, it's just you. You're the reason the show is good. Sometimes the audience sucks, but you're the only one to blame at a stand-up show; whereas, working with a cast, it's almost—to me the pressure is off," she says with an admitted sigh of relief. "There is still pressure to put on a good show or whatever, but it's a group effort and not just you. There are people handling the writing, there are people handling the lights, there is a director, and you're not in every single scene."

Sirleaf describes the present-day cast dynamic as everyone having a good time and warns of the reaction of sugar being in their vicinity. "We had donuts on set a couple weeks ago and we were like three-year-olds bouncing off the walls, but then you have to pull it together when they say, 'Action!'"

In the scenario of the show running its course, Sirleaf has a steady plan that will

be sure to take off after the positive reaction to her role as Donna. Reverting back to old trades and hunting down future endeavors are likely for her once the show is no more.

"I think I would still do stand-up just because I know it and it's kind of the reason I've gotten my visibility in L.A.," she states. "But, for me, I really would like to do more TV work. I want to do more movies in between TV, and I also write."

Exploring future endeavors would be just as appealing to Sirleaf fans as it would be for herself. Those who have followed her stand-up career and those who have fallen in love with her *Parks* character can look forward to more of her undertakings as time passes.

"The hope is to pitch a show or two that I've written. I have a few that I have written, but those aren't the ones that I like the most. I would actually be a secondary character," she reveals. "The leads are three guys and most of the things are about friendship—really close friendships."

***Parks and Recreation* returns Jan. 17 on NBC.**

## RETTA ON DONNA →

### WHAT DOES DONNA DO AFTER A DAY AT THE OFFICE?

She likes a soak and she likes for a very handsome, strong man to give her a massage.

### WHAT DOES SHE LOOK FOR IN A MAN?

Donna likes a man who is in his own life with his friends. He's a very "A" personality, kind of a leader. But when he's with her, she runs the situation. He's outgoing, but she can still be like, "No, we're not going to do this."

### IS SHE OBSESSED WITH ANYTHING AS MUCH AS SHE WAS WITH HER MERCEDES?

She was upset that she wrecked it for Leslie's campaign so she is probably going to have to move on to something next. I personally have a handbag obsession, so maybe she'll have a handbag obsession.

### WHAT IS DONNA'S BIGGEST SECRET?

I think her biggest secret would be that she is completely in love and smitten by someone who doesn't let her be in charge, but she would never let anybody know except for that person.

"With stand-up, it's just you. You're the reason the show is good. Sometimes the audience sucks, but you're the only one to blame at a stand-up show..."

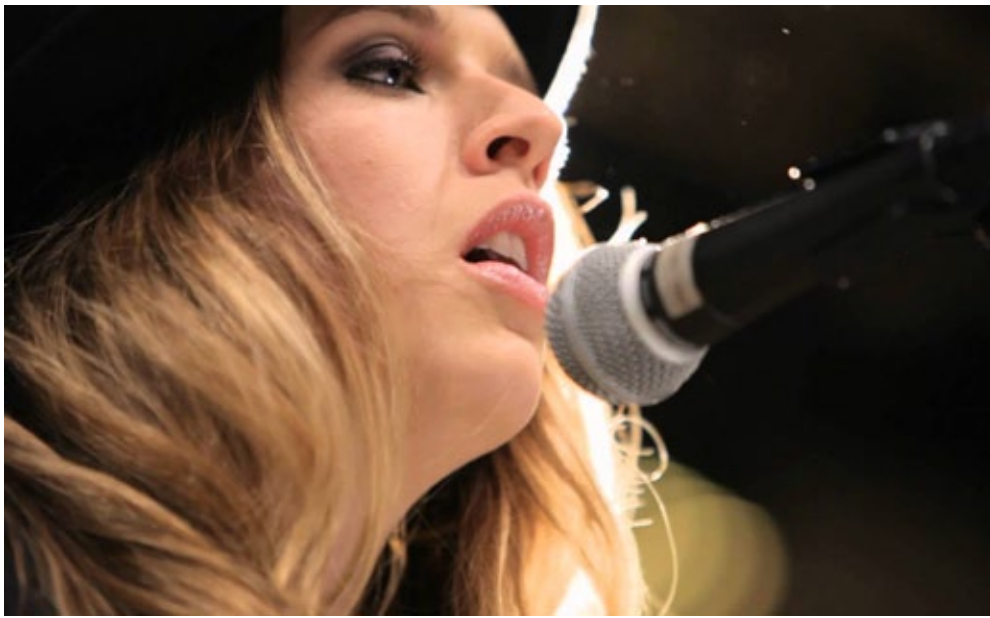


# ZZ WARD

BY JONATHAN ROBLES



# ZZ WARD IS BASICALLY THE ADELE OF BLUES.



For years, Zsuzsanna Ward has been building her resume with an eclectic combination of sounds, offering cuts that pull from hip-hop, jazz and soul. But this past year, she stepped it up significantly. While her name may be new to some, she's no stranger to this industry.

Last February, she dropped a mixtape that showcased her hip-hop roots with her own interpretation of tracks by Tyler, the Creator; Childish Gambino; Freddie Gibbs and Kendrick Lamar, with the latter two offering to contribute to her newest album *Til the Casket Drops*.

The months that followed her mixtape's release saw Ward's profile only increase. Following the *Criminal* EP in May, her songs started showing up everywhere. Her track "Put the Gun Down," specifically, plays like an anthem for all those scorned girlfriends refusing to let another woman steal their man.

Like Etta James before her, Ward's voice is soulfully sweet. Like Joss Stone, whiskey rich with a sultry grain. And like Adele, one can't help but love her powerhouse vocals—while perhaps being somewhat afraid of her.

"I'm just a girl," she says regarding the edgier persona displayed in much of her music, while laughing. "I'm harmless, for the most part. I was just raised around music, and it's what I know."

Ward, who was born and raised in Pennsylvania before relocating to Oregon at 12, credits her father for his musical influence on her life. "I grew up watching him sing in front

of people, and he was always writing songs. I kind of always saw him have this creative outlet through music, so I think seeing that growing up, it really kind of became something that I also really liked to do, which is writing songs. We would go up in front of people and sing, and he showed me it was something special to be able to share music with people."

Although life has changed some for the soulful singer, who's found herself playing across the country promoting the new album, she still keeps it pretty simple. "I always take my pillow with me because I sleep in so many different places that it's like I imagine I'm sleeping in one place every night, so my pillow helps."

While her gut-wrenching lyrics read like an emotional diary, Ward keeps the details close to her heart, careful not to give away any secrets. "I don't really talk about specific stories of my life," she explains. "But I think that as songwriters, we create more out of less. I think that's a gift, that's just something that you can do. Some of the situations that I wrote about on my record, it could've been this huge, dramatic thing that I wrote a song about, and it might not be. I've always been able to really describe things, really describe the way that I'm feeling when I'm going through something."

Although she herself has been widely-regarded as a fresh face in blues, the "Put the Gun Down" singer views fellow rocker Gary Clark Jr. as "bringing [blues] back." Ward says of Clark: "I think it's really cool seeing someone embrace

who they are and come back to the blues in a way. He's definitely doing that and putting more guitar in music, which obviously, in popular music, doesn't really have a place. So it's really refreshing."

Likewise, she points to fellow west-coaster Kendrick Lamar for influence: "He has an amazing ability to tell stories. I think that he really can describe a situation and make you feel like you're there, and make you feel like you almost know him through his music. He's incredibly gifted."

Ward also reveals her thoughts on those in the music industry she'd like to work with, ranging from The Black Keys, Jack White, Kanye West, and most specifically, Azealia Banks. "[It] would be amazing. She is definitely someone that I'm really impressed by. It's always fun being an artist when you see other artists that are really kind of pushing boundaries and just really embracing that sound. I love her; I would really love to work with her."

With a wish list like that, listeners may be eager—and rightfully so—for new music from Ward, but for now she's hitting the road, co-headlining with Delta Rae through March. What happens next, not even she knows. "Being a new artist, I'm going on this ride I've never been on before. I never put out a record before, so it's really exciting, going to play live shows and having people sing the lyrics. I've just kind of buckled up for the ride."


**Follow ZZ Ward's tour on Twitter: @ZZward.**





→	T	E	G	A	N
&	S	A	R	A	RACHEL FAYLENE





Forget what you think you know.

Forget the “gay band” thing.

*This* is their most ambitious year yet.

Tegan and Sara are chasing a *pop hit*.

PHOTOS: LINDSEY BYRNES



“I HOPE THAT, WITH THIS RECORD, WE WILL GET RADIO PLAY. . . NOT EVERYBODY AROUND THE WORLD IS LISTENING TO INDIE ROCK OR READING PITCHFORK.”

**I**ndie rock veterans Tegan and Sara share more than just the stage and a spotlight. The identical twin sisters formally known as Tegan Rain Quin and Sara Keirsten Quin share a bond that can't be broken, even through diverse music dynamics. The group was formed in 1995 and has since changed and grown in many ways. While the expansion of Tegan and Sara has been significant, there are substantial aspects that have remained the same.

“I think we realized early on that the significant element of our band that couldn't change was our voices,” reveals Sara. “It didn't matter if we were doing a band song, an acoustic song, or we were doing a punk rock song; at the end of the day, the thing that sort of identifies the track as being Tegan and Sara is our vocals.”

The sisters are true to themselves as much as they are to their music, and the voices of these women are heard in more ways than one. With gay rights being such a topical issue in the United States, both Tegan and Sara find being lesbians in the music world to be bittersweet in terms of the band's limitations.

“It's complicated because we are twins, and we are gay, and it is a huge part of our identity. We always say that the press and the public make a bigger deal out of it than we would,” Sara conveys without hesitation. “In the beginning of our career, we felt that a lot of people used those things to reduce us or exploit us in some way, and our career has changed and grown—we've accumulated more of a story. I feel like the emphases of those signifiers and descriptions have changed and, as a queer person, I feel like it's important to be a physical minority.”

During a time where opinions and discussions on sexual orientation can either be overexposed or pushed aside, she admits that it's not always an easy road for the band's popularity.

“Especially at this time and in this day,

I'm not embarrassed to have people refer to us as gay, or as a gay band, but I don't necessarily think that's accurate or always fair,” Sara admits. “I don't think it's done us any favors in terms of us cracking into the mainstream or having a more diverse, ambiguous audience to like us. I would love to get to a place where the things that are different about us, or special about us, aren't limiting us from reaching a broader audience.”

The size and range of Tegan and Sara's crowd has, in fact, expanded since the start of the group. The two have continued to release music rather tirelessly and have gained a dedicated following over the years.

“As an artist, when you're making music and you're touring for a living, you start setting all these goals for yourself,” says Sara. “Tegan and I have accomplished the many things we wanted to accomplish. We've been all over the world and we've seen our audience grow from a handful of people, to a hundred people, to five hundred people, to now.”

Together the girls have experienced every level of touring and every level of obscurity. And while the group has a career playing in front of thousands and headlining festivals, there is still something on the to-do list for Tegan and Sara.

“We still haven't had a big radio proper hit,” she confesses. “There's a part of me that [says] that's still kind of on the list of things to accomplish with this band.”

In 2005, a track called “Walking with a Ghost” from their fourth album, *So Jealous*, was hitting commercial airwaves, taking the band beyond college and satellite radio. Sara pinpoints this time frame as a pivotal moment in their careers.

“We were still very much what I would consider a cult band. We didn't receive a lot of mainstream media and we hadn't done a lot of stuff with television or anything like that. All of a sudden, between touring with The Killers and having a song on alternative rock radio in the Unit-



ed States, we really saw our audience grow and started to see opportunities that we hadn't in the past.”

Indie rock bands are beginning to see more mainstream radio play as a path to gaining bigger fan bases. In the past, this wasn't as attainable for artists that weren't on major labels with million dollar backings. Collaborations and remixes, however, have played a significant role in combining the two worlds and giving exposure to some of these smaller artists.

This has proven true for Tegan and Sara while working with world famous DJ, Tiesto. Originally remixing “Back in Your Head,” Tiesto found himself collaborating with the girls for “Feel It in My Bones.” Both works received notable airplay internationally and have created a new playing field for the girls to conquer.

“I think it's interesting,” she says. “We weren't necessarily having radio hits off our own albums, but we've been able to cross over into more public radio and pop radio with some of our other efforts, which has been really cool because it's allowed us to create relationships with [the right] people.”



The sisters are looking for their seventh studio album, *Heartthrob*, to be the key to the one door they have yet to open, which brings up the issue of just how relevant radio is for lesser-known bands. The trail of radio play for Tegan and Sara has been sparse, but may soon be well-traveled with the release of their newest album.

"I hope that, with this record, we will get radio play," Sara says. "For us, the idea was to spend more time thinking about how the music sonically and aesthetically would sound and reach a broader group of people. On our past records, we were happier playing our music, and doing what we wanted, and sounding the way that we wanted, not necessarily thinking about how that sound might limit us."

During the writing process, Tegan and Sara discussed the

potential of *Heartthrob* and the vision of furthered success with this unfamiliar territory. Wanting to move forward with their achievements, both girls aimed to write tracks that appeal to already dedicated fans and those who are tuned into popular radio.

"We did actually talk about that on this record—and not in a mainstream, selling out kind of way. But not everybody around the world is listening to indie rock or reading Pitchfork," she says.

"You start to realize, wow, there's a whole part of the world that wouldn't even know about us because we're more of an indie rock band. The art of collaborating and remixing is fantastic, and it's been a wonderful way for Tegan and me to get out to a lot of different people and a lot of different types of audiences. We'll continue to do those things in order to expand the magic."

*Heartthrob* is destined to captivate a new audience and gain an even bigger following, all while maintaining that old-school Tegan and Sara vibe. The writing process and inspiration behind the creativity was a familiar journey for the ladies, combining similar tasks and outlooks that they both took on as always.

"We write totally individually. We live in different cities, so you know the majority of our songwriting is done kind of independently on our own at home," Sarah explains. "With this record, I did a little bit more writing with Tegan, still living in different cities, but she would send me a song that wasn't totally finished and she would be like, 'Can you throw down an idea for the bridge?'"

Taking on artistic duties in different locations and time zones can test a band's ability to agree or collaborate well

together. For Tegan and Sara, their independence from each other doesn't deter their ability to find a common theme for their work.

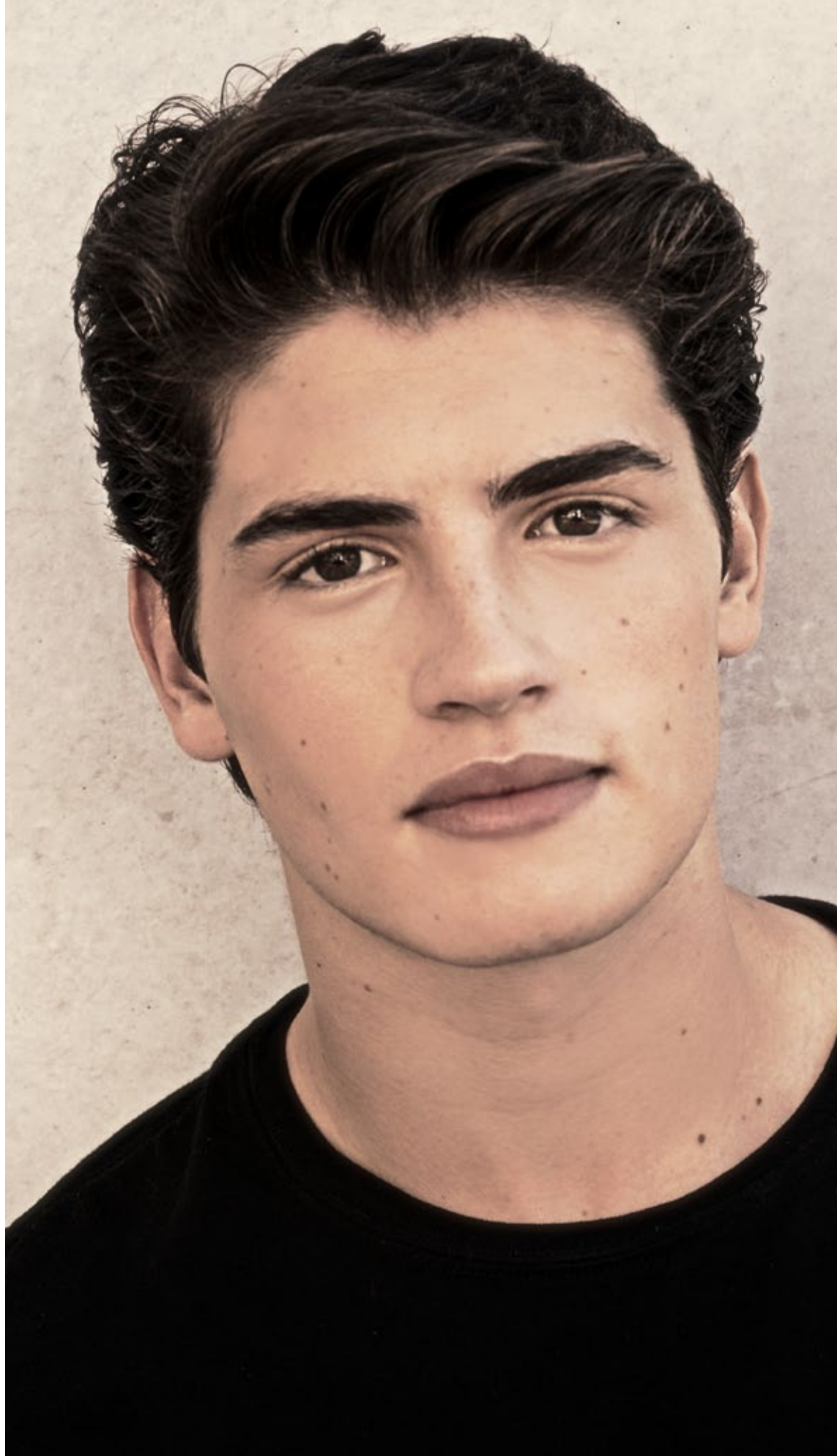
"We sort of laugh and say that as you get older, your lens changes through which you view relationships and different perspectives," she shares honestly. "You know, the general idea is still the relationships that we've experienced and maybe the relationships that we're seeing around us. There're a few songs on the record that explore more of just getting older, life and mortality."

Even with years of experience and success, Sara humbly confesses her excitement and hopes for the future. "I just like the idea that we're not a new band; we're not a band that doesn't have experience, and this is our first big record."

***Heartthrob* releases Jan. 29.**



# GREGG SULKIN



The  
British  
Actor  
**OPENS UP**  
About His  
Growing  
*American*  
Fanbase:

**IT'S NICE TO**

**KNOW IT'S NOT**

**JUST ME ON THIS**

**JOURNEY**

Perhaps you've noticed his boyishly charming good looks on the ABC Family hit show, *Pretty Little Liars*, or maybe it's from the Disney Channel original series, *Wizards of Waverly Place*. Regardless of the medium, actor Gregg Sulkin has viewers taking a second glance, and it's not just because of his good looks.

Sulkin began his acting career when he was 13, and even though he always wanted to be a soccer player, he gave into the nudging of his mother and went to his first audition.

"I don't know why I went," Sulkin says, "but I just kind of did it to keep my mom happy. She said, 'If you go to this audition, I'll never ask you to do anything else for me again.' So I was like, 'Perfect, every kid's dream,' you know. I go to the audition, and six or seven callbacks later, I ended up booking the lead role with Helena Bonham Carter playing my mom, a British comedienne Catherine Tate playing my aunt, and I was the lead role in this movie called, *Sixty Six*. It was a big deal in England, so ever since then, it kind of cannonballed and I fell in love with the industry, then I just kind of stayed with it ever since."

It was this love for the industry that propelled the young British star to move his career from Britain to America. But despite any apprehensions that others might have had about whether he'd be able to make it here or not, Sulkin stated that he never had any fears about it.

"I've never thought, 'Oh, what if I don't succeed?'" says Sulkin. "I've just already convinced myself to know [that it would work out] or maybe I was just kind of naive in thinking that everything is going to work out. You know, so far everything has worked out. The American market is very different, but the American fans have definitely taken

a liking to me. I think the American market has allowed me to be more recognizable all around the world, which has been nice. It's nice to develop a fan base that's worldwide."

There are no doubts that Sulkin's worldwide fans love his role as Wesley on *Pretty Little Liars*, which is set to air its midseason premiere on Jan. 8 at 8 p.m. Having come from shows like *Melissa and Joey* and *Wizards of Waverly Place*, Sulkin admits that the transition to a one hour drama was important for him because of the opportunity it gave his fans to see him do something different.

So what can anxious viewers expect to see from Wesley in January?

"[At] the end of the third season, you'll be able to see Wesley's past a bit more and where he's come from," says Sulkin. "Right now the audience thinks like, 'Okay, this is random, he's just randomly a Rosewood.' So you'll get to see why he's there, kind of what his motives are and the audience will be able to make a clearer decision if they like him or not."

But that's not the only role that Sulkin can be seen playing in the new year. The Disney Channel has announced a special one-hour *Wizards of Waverly Place* TV special for early 2013. Sulkin expresses excitement to be doing it.

"The family goes to Italy for the reunion and you know there are more special effects and there's more drama than others," says Sulkin. "We're excited for the fans to see that. It was kind of like putting on old slippers again. It wasn't difficult for us to do so; this was just a project that we thought, if we could get everybody together scheduling-wise, then we can give something back to the fans, and thank God we got everyone together and did it."

Aside from television, Sulkin is also known for his appearances on the big screen. In early 2012,

he was seen in the drama-comedy *White Frog*.

"That's what I call a passionate project," Sulkin explains. "I was very, very passionate about the script. We had a very good young cast and the structure of the script was perfect. So the character, I have never ever played before in my life—that was to this day the most challenging role I've ever played; a kid looking, from the outside, really comfortable in his own skin, but inside he's absolutely torn ... Everybody who has seen the movie loved it. They cried, they laughed. It's an emotional roller coaster and the character is very likeable and you go on this journey with the character. That was really, really fun to be a part of."

The British actor also states that he's always wanted to do everything and enjoys this point in his life where he can do television and film. "Right now, I'm just kind of happy balancing it out," he says.

As he continues to balance TV and film, curiosity arises about when he will transition from teen roles to more mature roles.

"I can't play a thirty-year-old, so I do what I can," Sulkin says. "Each project, I try not to make silly decisions on what I take and don't take. I need to grow, I need to keep growing as a person and actor. Then, as I do that, obviously my roles would change."

With a heart of gratitude towards his fans, Sulkin talks about how much the ongoing support means to him.

"I'm on the other side of the world and it's nice to know it's not just me on this journey," Sulkin says.

**For more information on Sulkin's latest activities, go to: [twitter.com/GreggSulkin](https://twitter.com/GreggSulkin) and [facebook.com/GreggSulkin](https://facebook.com/GreggSulkin).**





## SPOTLIGHT *ON* OVERCOMING AFFLICTION

BY MICHAEL GARCIA

If you've heard of Mountain Home, Arkansas, then it might be due to its famous fishing grounds, its retirement and resort destinations, mass hunting grounds, prestigious golf courses, or even a late 70s flick starring Robert De Niro that was filmed in the city and around Baxter County. However, the newly formed band Overcoming Affliction is seeking to impact their hometown as well as the people they encounter along their excursions with an inspirational message.

The rock band started in February of 2011 and consists of five members: Cody Clark, Jerad Moffit, Jake Stephenson, David Gann and Brandon Saucier. Each member has been and still is heavily involved in their church worship team or are worship music leaders. With their experienced musical backgrounds, OA has been able to perform around Arkansas for various events in addition to releasing

their new album, *Rescue Me*.

Out of each of the eight tracks on the album, listeners will get many different sounds and vibes. Some songs may carry a soft ballad with power-driven vocals or an edgy, hard rock feel with heavy drums and piercing guitar sounds.

The band's hope is to share the message and their life experiences with those who might be going through similar situations. Learning from their past obstacles in life, one of OA's mottos for listeners is, "You can't overcome your afflictions on your own, but with God you can."

Everyone has gone through a rough time in life, and that moment when people have no strength left and need help is the moment OA wants to capture in their music. Tracks such as "Rescue Me," "Live Again" and "You'll Make a Way" are tracks the band believes will inspire people to feel hope in any tough circumstance. Each member's main inspiration

is to help people that are hurting and need help. There is no barrier to where they want to take their music.

When performing, OA likes to keep a friendly vibe that does not entail the typical seriousness of a performance. Having an inviting and friendly environment is a key aspect of what they do, they believe. Being able to interact with the crowd through humor is another important aspect they feel helps loosen the vibe and create a relaxing atmosphere. It is important for the band to not only interact in various ways with their audience, but to interact spiritually as well.

These young men understand that their musical backgrounds were instilled by their families, but for them, it is also a gift that has been given by God; it is their hope to reach as many people as possible.

**For more on the band, go to [facebook.com/overcomingaffliction](https://www.facebook.com/overcomingaffliction).**



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