

JIMMY EAT WORLD + THE LONELY ISLAND + EISLEY + SURFER BLOOD

# VARIANCE

THE SIGHTS + SOUNDS YOU LOVE

PORTUGAL.  
THE MAN

SKYLAR GREY

EMINEM'S HITMAKER PROTÉGÉ  
ISN'T LOOKING DOWN

DAVID ANDERS

TV'S FAVORITE VILLAIN GETS  
ROUGH WITH JOHN STAMOS

+

LAURA  
MARLING

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COACHELLA 2013

## SUMMER IS HERE, FOLKS!

And it's here to stay—for a couple more months anyway. With summer festival season in full swing, more up-and-coming bands are being introduced to audiences all over the world. It's a wonderful time to be a musician, and an even better time to be a music fan.

With festivals like Firefly and Bonnaroo already done and gone, acts like Capital Cities and The Last Royals are finally getting the recognition they deserve. They're talking to us now about their journey.

In this issue, we catch up with the timeless favorite Jimmy Eat World, talking about the new record and why consistency works for them over the bells and whistles that many of their peers have fallen for.

Jack-of-all-trades actor David Anders, most notably TV's favorite villain on shows like *Vampire Diaries* and *Once Upon a Time*, gives us the scoop on one of his crazier fan encounters; actress Katee Sackhoff talks about working with Vin Diesel and how she maintains balance in her life; Derek Vincent Smith of Pretty Lights tells us what he really thinks of EDM; and we slip into the mind of the hauntingly beautiful

music maker Skylar Grey, Eminem's protégé, who's finally getting her moment in the spotlight.

Our cover artist, J. Cole, recently stunned the music industry by moving the release date of his sophomore record, *Born Sinner*, to the same day as Kanye West's buzzworthy new album, *Yeezus*. He doubled on sales predictions and debuted at No. 2 right behind West. In a truly rare scenario, *Born Sinner* this month climbed its way up to No. 1, cementing his place as one of the year's biggest stars. Writer Weston Shepherd discusses the rapper's role as a new leader within hip-hop and why J. Cole is one of the best in the game.

It may be hard to believe that we're more than halfway through 2013, but we feel there are still plenty of incredible Sights and Sounds on the way. Keep those eyes and ears open; it only gets better from here. →



**AVICII FT. ALOE BLACC**  
"Wake Me Up"  
by @prettyraver



**MILEY CYRUS**  
"We Can't Stop"  
by @AlexanderGold



**DAFT PUNK FT. PHARRELL**  
"Lose Yourself to Dance"  
by @MoleCertins



**MACKLEMORE & RYAN LEWIS**  
"Same Love"  
by @Politicana



**J. COLE FT. TLC**  
"Crooked Smile"  
by @ShowMe\_Luv



**JOHN NEWMAN**  
"Love Me Again"  
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**JAY Z FT. JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE**  
"Holy Grail"  
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**ELLIE GOULDING**  
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Q + A



# THE 1975

BY EMILY HULSEBERG

*Manchester-based art-pop quartet The 1975 are quickly climbing the charts across the United States and Britain. After a string of sold-out performances, the foursome will release their self-titled debut record this fall, followed by a North American headlining tour. Vocalist-guitarist Matthew Healy took time between tour stops to talk with Variance.*

## **How did the band form?**

Through a reaction to boredom to be honest with you. Just me and my mates, we started playing in punk bands when we were about 13 and we've never left each other's side since then really, so we've been together for about 10 years.

## **How has your sound evolved since you first started playing?**

It's manifested itself in lots of different ways. We've gone from being a loud kind of skate, punk band to almost like an '80s pop project. We wanted our records to feel like a John Hughes movie soundtrack.



PHOTO: ROSE HARDY

excellence amongst four individuals. I suppose when we decided we were going to do it, we wanted people to really love our band as much as we love it. I think in order to acquire that you need a certain amount of material. We wanted to put out records that were all bodies of work that kind of said something about who we were, so people could make an emotional investment. The more you know about somebody, the more you invest in the relationship, the more rewarding it is for both of you, so that's the way we thought about it.

**You mentioned how you guys had a lot of different name changes. Why did "The 1975" stick with you all?**

It was a time where we'd been tarnished a bit. Not tarnished, but we'd been around major labels that showed a lot of interest and we ended up not getting signed to a major label and it wasn't really disheartening, it just revitalized us and we realized what we wanted. We just thought it summed us up at the time, we didn't really know our own identity.

**Where did your love of John Hughes films come about? Do you have a favorite?**

That's what I was brought up on really, what I would watch. I used to be obsessed with *Pretty In Pink* and *Weird Science*, *Breakfast Club* and all those kinds of movies. It's not necessarily stylistically something that we've tried to parallel. We've not tried to make an 80's sounding record, but it's the way those records make you feel. It's that kind of nostalgic, kind of life-affirming, not overly romantic vibe that those movies have and it's something we wanted to capture in our record.

**Why do you think touring is so important for up-and-coming bands?**

'Cause you need to be really good live. It's all very well being stylistically cool or clever or having a concrete vision, but if you can't portray that to 150 fellow human beings in a room with no kind of cloaks and no kind of smoke and mirrors, then you're not going to sustain, you know? So, I just think you've gotta tour. You owe it to the people who enjoy your music.

**What do you hope people take away from your music?**

I hope that it kind of frames moments in their lives. I hope that songs remind them of stuff. I hope people fall in love to our

record. I hope people fall out of love to our record. I hope people hate our record, I hope people love our record. Once it's released, it's not really ours anymore. It's everybody else's. I just like the idea of it framing genuine emotional situations.

**We've been hearing "Chocolate" constantly in the States. What's it been like for your music to have international success?**

It's very, very humbling. And very, very personally and professionally rewarding. Something that we're catching up with cause as soon as everything started going...we left and went on tour and we've been in a different foreign city pretty much since "Chocolate" came out. We've not really had much time to kind of take in and sit at home and listen to the radio, and check the music channels.

**What inspires you as an artist to write and play music?**

The fact that I won't eat if I don't do it. I don't know how to do anything else. I've never been able to know how to do anything else, so I suppose that's enough inspiration as it is.

**What's your favorite thing about being a musician?**

I don't know. It's such an all-encompassing thing for me, like it takes up my entire life. I think the fact that I get to express myself, like straight up and arrogantly for a job, and that is embraced across the world, that's the best thing about being a musician.

**What are some of your goals as a band? Or do you just kind of play it by ear as you go?**

Yeah, you've gotta play it by ear in order to be ambitious, in order to project your own success. We played a venue in London that was just under 500 capacity and we just now, two months later, announced a show at Brixton Academy, which is 5,000. So, things have gotten 10 times bigger for us in the past two months. So, trying to predict what's going to happen would probably be silly. We just want to make records that we're proud of and we want to play to people who really, really care about music. If we get to that and it's sunny, then it's sweet.

**Why did you all decide to release so many EPs before doing a debut full-length?**

First of all, we didn't really feel the need to put out any music. We weren't that desperate for kind of any validation. We were very happy just playing music as a pursuit of

---

**To follow the band's tour and for news on their forthcoming record, go to [the1975.com](http://the1975.com)**



# EISLEY

THEIR NEW WAVE



*Eisley frontwoman Sherri Dupree-Bemis on the new record, babies and having it all.*

As “mommy wars” rage on between the stay-at-home and working mothers of the world, the women of alt-pop band Eisley have demanded the best of both worlds. Their fourth full-length album *Currents* released May 28 by Equal Vision Records, kicking off a new tour supporting Say Anything—with four new members in tow.

They aren’t background vocalists, though we’re sure vocal rehearsals are louder these days, and they don’t play instruments, though we’re also confident they make plenty of noise. They are the first children of sisters Stacy (DuPree) King, Sherri DuPree-Bemis, and Chantelle DuPree D’Agostino, as well as drummer Weston DuPree’s wife, Jessie, all infants born in the last nine months.

“It’s unreal how much joy it has brought to everyone,” DuPree-Bemis says. “It’s just fun! Pretty much the best thing that’s ever happened.”

While she claims there was no real pregnancy pact, Dupree-Bemis admits that reaching the same milestone of parenthood so close together has had its advantages for the band.

“As we planned the touring schedule [last year], in the back of our minds we’re all thinking, ‘if we all had kids right now, we’d kind of be on the same schedule being pregnant and them being around the same age and taking them out on the road. And then it actually worked out,’” she laughs. “These kids are gonna grow up together so close, having best friends to hang out with on tour all the time, and that was really important to us.”

Of course, with family additions—and this many all at once—come major changes. *Currents* embodies some of the transformation the DuPree crew has undergone this year: It’s their first LP written, recorded and produced at their new home studio, and the liberation is evident.

“It was the most relaxing experience we’ve ever had writing or recording a record,” DuPree-Bemis says. “Doing it yourself comes with pressure because it’s hard to blame it on anyone but yourself if something isn’t right, but it was a good pressure we put on ourselves to make an excellent record and put our best out there. It was just so natural because we were hanging out at home writing songs and that’s what we do normally.”

Only this time, Eisley had the freedom

and the resources to make those songs come to life on their own terms. *Currents* reflects a more laid back, organic way of writing and producing that, compared with their previous offerings, leaves the distinct impression of unretouched creativity.

“There’s no outside input from anyone but the band, creatively, so I think that gave us that sense of liberation,” DuPree-Bemis explains. “I think you can actually hear that in the record, that we did have creative control and we weren’t trying to please anyone or write perfect pop songs for the radio or succumb to any of those pressures that come with being on a major label—that’s just how it is.”

The album expands Eisley’s borders with haunting piano and ambient electric arrangements, threading a certain ethereal tone between 12 lyrically and thematically diverse tracks. It’s still pop-rock, just longer and moodier. But it’s not a melancholy album by any means. While “Currents” and “Drink the Water” represent the softer, bluer ballads, “Save My Soul” and “Wicked Child” balance the album with sunlight.

“Honestly, I think it’s just pure, raw Eisley.”

Perhaps the most defining characteristic of a band of siblings who’ve been making music together for the majority of their lives is the fact that time and growing up hasn’t splintered them as life often does to even the closest families. In fact, it’s a little unreal how tight this crew is. Really, four family pregnancies in succession the same year? That’s a whole new level of *esprit de corps*.

DuPree-Bemis offered further evidence that the DuPrees might know something about togetherness that the rest of us don’t. “The title track was the last song that we wrote for the record, and it’s actually one that I wrote but I envisioned Stacy singing it,” she recalls. “I had to go on tour with my husband who’s in Say Anything and [Eisley was] finishing up that last song. So I left and I didn’t even get to hear that song recorded.

“Stacy laid down the vocals with just a scratch track I gave her, and getting that song back without having any input and having it sound just like I imagined, even better, was really cool because it just made me feel like I really am that close with my band and we really are in tune with each other. That track is really special to me be-

cause I actually had no involvement in it and it turned out just how I wanted it to.”

Amazing family, new at-home studio, great indie label who loves them, creative autonomy and four little bundles of joy: DuPree-Bemis and her band seem to have it all.

“I just feel so blessed that we’ve gotten to do everything that we’ve done and on top of that we just have these amazing children,” says the awestruck new mom. “I know a lot of people look at starting a family as a time to put the brakes on and slow down. We’re totally focusing on being the best parents that we can, but at the same time, these kids are now in this amazing, loving, musical environment, so it hasn’t stopped us or made us think twice about going ahead with our career because they’ll all be there along the way. They’re part of the journey now and it just makes it more beautiful and special.”

“I could die happy, easy, right now,” she asserts. “No question about it.”

But lest we leave the impression it’s all roses and rainbows for Eisley, the road to the *Currents* tour with Say Anything (which recently wrapped up) was paved with disappointment and last resorts. After a failed Kickstarter attempt to cover their newly inflated travel costs (15 passenger vans aren’t exactly baby-friendly), the DuPrees made a decision that it was worth whatever sacrifices they had to make to support *Currents*.

“We scrounged around and borrowed from people, from family members and friends, and it sucks to do that,” DuPree-Bemis painfully recalls. “It’s not fun and I don’t recommend it because you just don’t want to have to do that in business, but doing this tour was that important to us. We had the new record coming out and the opportunity to tour [with Say Anything as a family] and have it be this kind of ideal tour. We were just too invested in the idea and turning it down was going to be too painful for everyone.”

Artists are forced to make decisions like this all the time, and for bands like Eisley, it’s worth doing whatever it takes to keep doing what they were made to do.

“You want to do something enough, and you love it and you’re passionate about it, you will find a way, come hell or high water,” DuPree-Bemis resolves. “That’s what we’ll always do to keep making music.”

**Check out *Currents* now on iTunes.**



*THE  
LONELY  
ISLAND*

# The Boys Are Back



ARTWORK BY F. SCOTT SCHAFER  
STORY BY LAUREN MORANOR



**A**kiva Schaffer, Jorma Taccone and Andy Samberg were born and raised in the Bay Area during the rise of the Hyphy music movement. Brought up on a healthy diet of Eddie Murphy, movies paired with E-40 and Too \$hort albums, the three met in middle school, forming a bond over their similar interests. Years later, the trio would form the comedy rap group, The Lonely Island, something that was never intended to become what it is today.

The trio combined their love of comedy and hip-hop during their time on the hit NBC show, *Saturday Night Live*.

“The very notion of rapping for comedy is a very fine line and we try and be really careful about how we walk it because when it’s not done right, it’s like the thing we hate the most in the world ... the joke is that we’re white nerds rapping,” says Samberg.

That white-nerds-rapping thing took off after The Lonely Island released a video for “Lazy Sunday” as an *SNL* digital short. Samberg was shocked by the response, not expecting the video to become an instant hit as the rap racked up millions of views on YouTube. The comedians took the success and rode it to three full albums,

Emmy wins and Grammy nominations. As their third studio album, *The Wack Album*, was released in June, the trio have never changed their process for turning jokes into a full-fledged hip-hop genre.

It all starts with a joke. The guys are not interested in delivering something that could be considered corny or insulting to their favorite style of music. Schaffer is not willing to just throw something out in a song without a purpose behind it. “There has to be a joke and then rap, R&B, pop is the vessel in which we deliver the joke.” Taccone notes that as pop music and rap music change, they try and

change with it, twisting their references to modern day.

The content of the *The Wack Album* certainly fits the bill for feeling more 2013 in terms of the themes in each song. The Lonely Island has earned a reputation for daring lyrical content (“Motherlover” or “The Creep”), but on their third effort, the songs feel slightly less bombastic. Referencing things like YOLO or Spring Break parties, the jokes are more developed and well-written. They push silliness to new extremes while also working in a few socially-conscious topics like gay marriage.

“I wouldn’t say we try and push the envelope in terms of shock value, but certainly try and think of different jokes so it doesn’t feel stale and we try and think of different ways to construct a comedy song,” says Taccone.

Stale is certainly something *The Wack Album* is not. Despite already having two albums under their belt, the group finds a way to keep the jokes fresh and the listener on their toes. No longer having to adhere to the busy schedule that comes with *SNL*, The Lonely Island took its time making sure it truly produced a record it was proud of and something the people wanted.

The trio thinks their longtime friendship with one another is what makes these albums truly come together. They remain each other’s checks and balances. If two people laugh at a joke, it stays in the song. If two people do not laugh, the joke is thrown out.

“It’s harder in some ways because you can’t get away with anything because you know everything about one another. We have all the same references. There is no learning period about what is going to work, we can just hit the ground running,” explains Taccone.

As usual, the tracklist features a list of marquee names ranging from Robyn to Kendrick Lamar, Adam Levine, Kristen Wiig and Hugh Jackman. Some collaborations were easier to come by than others. Jackman was brought in for a collaboration after meeting Samberg at a New York Knicks’ basketball game. Others passed on songs because the lyrical content pushed their boundaries too much.

The comedians are very aware that some guests are more willing to get raunchy than others. Schaffer says, “We’re very conscious of the different person-

alities, if someone doesn’t want to curse as much, or if someone doesn’t want to play with their image too much.”

He recalls the collaboration with Lamar. The rapper wanted to write his own verse for “Yolo.” He took a few minutes to jot down lyrics and the group just looked at each other and said, “Well, we hope it’s funny.” The song ended up becoming one of the strongest on the album.

“For rappers, we’ll leave open which bars of music they’re going to do, and give them bullet points of the joke ideas that they can put into their own words. We want the rapper to feel like himself, and not like he’s doing someone else’s lyric,” says Schaffer.

The trio remains highly involved in the entire process of creating the album. Working with a group of producers, they sift through a stack of beats until they find one that matches. The yellow pads are pulled out and the troupe writes things that hopefully make one another laugh. With this album, The Lonely Island appears much improved on making an actual song. The production is more slick, the beats are less generic and the song structures feel more formal and cohesive.

*The Wack Album* works in a wide range of musical genres. There is the familiar auto-tuned R&B from Samberg and Justin Timberlake on “3-Way (The Golden Rule).” The current dubstep trend is worked in with Robyn on “Go Kindergarten.” The Lonely Island also maintains the era of throwback rap that inspired it in the first place on “Diaper Money” or “I Run NY.” They play with pop-rap while also venturing into trap with “The Compliments.” Samberg wanted to present as many different sounds as possible in order for things to not feel redundant.

The album was promoted through a weekly video release labeled, “Wacky Wednesday.” No longer on the television each week, The Lonely Island felt the video releases were a good way of reminding America they still exist. “We took a page out of Kanye West’s book,” laughs Samberg.

The reality is the music videos are what put The Lonely Island on the map in the first place. Taccone says that as a group they are very visual writers. He knows exactly what each video would look like for each song off the album. Much to

Taccone’s dismay, the group cannot release a video for each song, but certainly intend on getting as many out as possible.

Despite no longer being on *SNL*, the trio still follows the strict schedule they were once used to. Most videos are done in a short 48-hour time frame. Some videos will take up to a week to be put together, depending on individual schedules. Samberg believes the video is just as important as the song itself.

“We are always writing very visually so obviously it is another great way to get the joke across. Some people have trouble hearing jokes. With the videos, it is just being like, ‘Here is what the joke is,’” says Samberg.

The videos have done their job, essentially being responsible for the three records the comedians now have out. Schaffer said the friends never truly imagined that one video would create the culture phenomenon that is The Lonely Island.

With great success comes the demand for touring. Fans have been begging the comedy troupe to do a tour and present the music in a live format. A tour has always been a hope for the guys, but as emerging stars in Hollywood, their busy schedules have been tough to coordinate.

Samberg is setting up shop in Los Angeles as he begins the new television comedy, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*. The show was picked up by FOX for next season. Taccone, who made his directorial debut with *MacGruber*, will begin writing the sequel with fellow *SNL* alum, Will Forte. He is also completely down for a return on HBO comedy, *Girls*, where he played Marnie’s lover, Booth Johnathan. A tour is certainly a dream for The Lonely Island, but making it work is easier said than done.

All three have said goodbye to *SNL*, the show that catapulted the comedians into their careers and was a launching pad for The Lonely Island. *The Wack Album* does not feel like a series of random comedy sketches formed into music, but full-fledged songs in the genre the group has dubbed “joke-hop.” The Lonely Island is no longer a silly side project created after Lorne Michaels discovered the three at the 2005 MTV Movie Awards, but a real music group, setting out to be taken seriously in the least serious format. ■

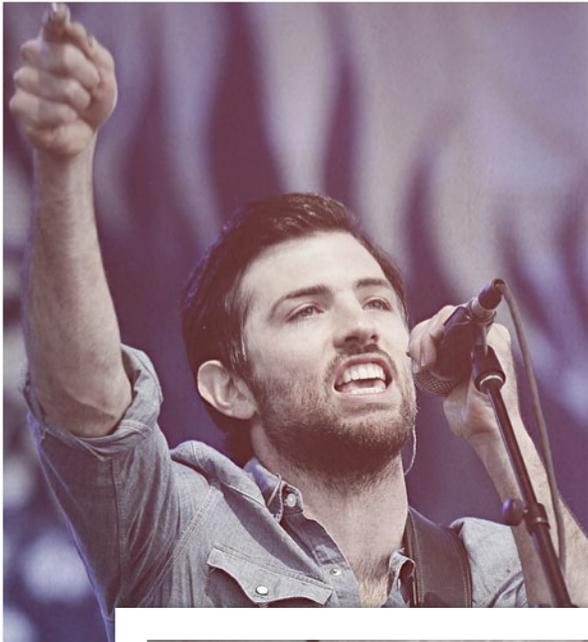
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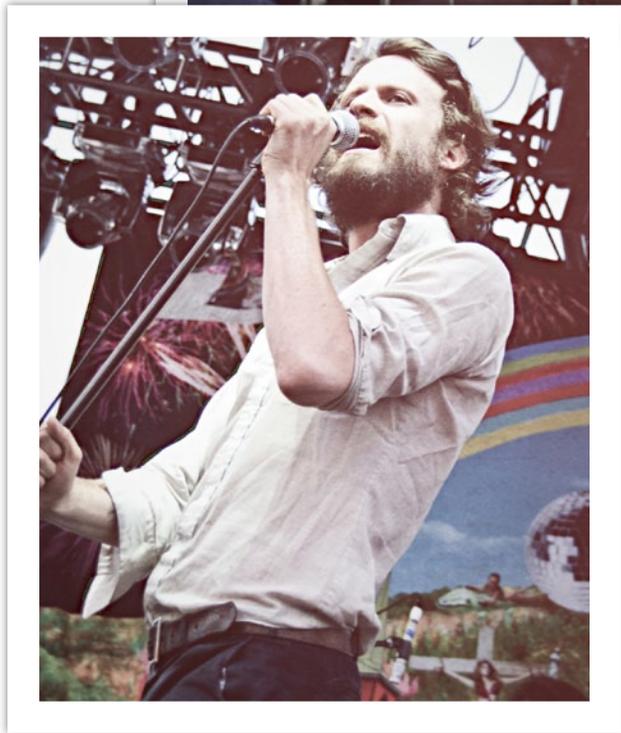
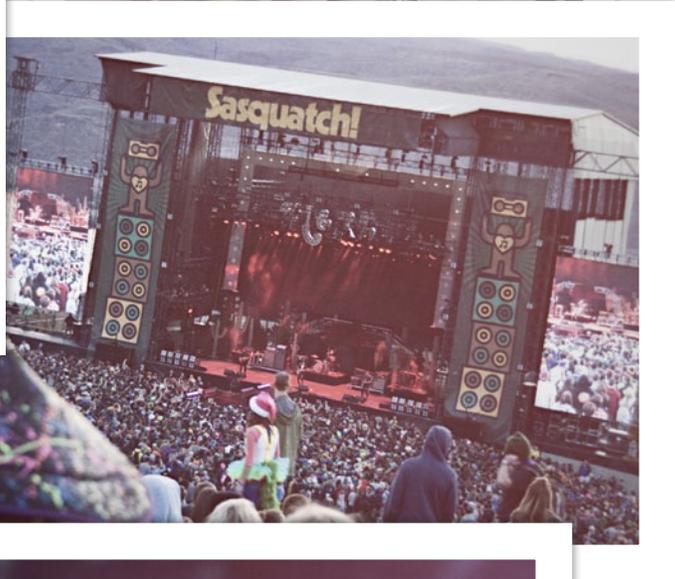
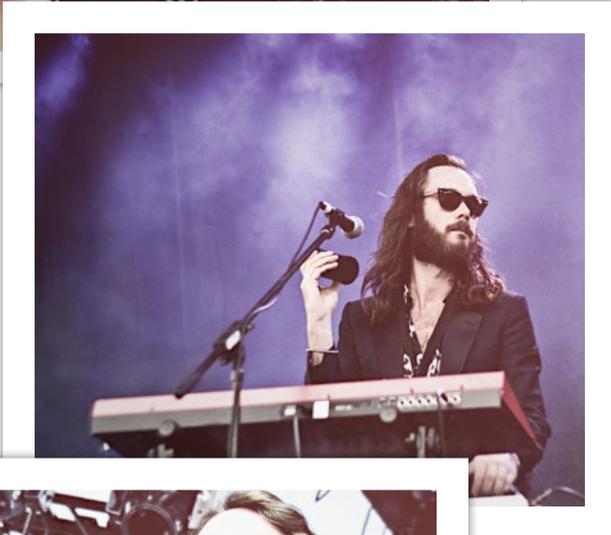
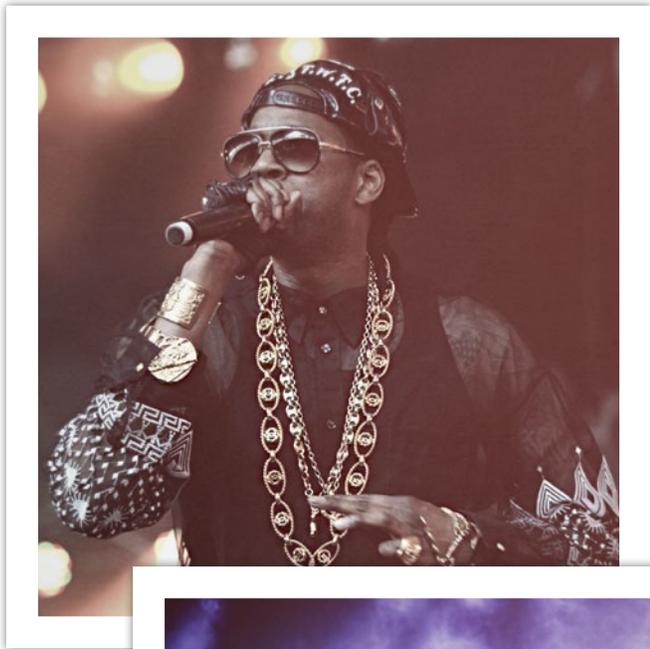
VARIANCE

La Roux at Coachella 2013, by Jennifer Botello





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT (THIS PAGE): THE AVETT BROTHERS AT BOTTLEROCK FESTIVAL BY MIKE WINDLE; THE FLAMING LIPS' WAYNE COYNE AT BOTTLEROCK BY MIKE WINDLE; ACTRESS ANNASOPHIA ROBB, MODEL ALESSANDRA AMBROSIO AND ACTOR CHRIS PINE AT LACOSTE'S COACHELLA POOL PARTY BY JOE SCARNICI; THE BLACK KEYS' DAN AUERBACH AT BOTTLEROCK BY MIKE WINDLE; ALABAMA SHAKES' BRITTANY HOWARD AT BOTTLEROCK BY MIKE WINDLE // (NEXT PAGE): 2 CHAINZ AT COACHELLA BY JOHN SHEARER; EDWARD SHARPE & THE MAGNETIC ZEROS AT BOTTLEROCK BY MIKE WINDLE; SASQUATCH MAIN STAGE CROWD VIEW BY DUSTIN MEEHAN; THE SHINS' JAMES MERCER AT BOTTLEROCK BY MIKE WINDLE; FATHER JOHN MISTY AT SASQUATCH BY DUSTIN MEEHAN; WILD BELLE'S ELLIOT BERGMAN AT SASQUATCH BY DUSTIN MEEHAN



# PHOTO DIARIES





PHOTO  
DIARIES



**JANELLE MONÁE**  
**COACHELLA 2013**



PORTUGAL.

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THE

---

MAN

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BY EMILY HULSEBERG







## PORTUGAL. THE MAN IS NO STRANGER

to writing and recording music. The Portland-based group first released music in 2005 and has consistently been releasing new albums/EPs ever since.

Without catching a breath, the band just put out what has been called their best record to date, *Evil Friends*.

The band had already been at work on the album when they got a call to come meet with Danger Mouse (aka Brian Burton) in New York City. The producer and five-time Grammy winner—who’s worked with Cee Lo Green, The Black Keys and Beck, to name a few—decided to produce *Evil Friends* after sitting down with Portugal’s John Gourley. Gourley says Burton was “the one producer [I] knew I couldn’t say no to.”

Without anything being set, he took off to New York and met with Danger Mouse. Right off the bat, Gourley says the former half of duo Gnarlz Barkley told him, “I don’t really want to make a record with another rock band.” It was a statement that made him realize what a “stand up dude” Danger Mouse is.

Gourley expressed to his soon-to-be producer that he wanted to make “the best record,” and the two joined together to make an album that’s full of surprises and unlike anything the band has released thus far.

Once in the studio, Gourley didn’t know what to expect. “I actually didn’t expect him to work the way he does,” he recalls. “My expectations were—they weren’t really

there. I mean, I really love the music that he makes and I really appreciate his drum sound.”

It seems like people can hear a track and immediately know that Danger Mouse has produced it. Gourley says that people are constantly tweeting at him saying they knew their song was a Danger Mouse track right when they heard it.

“He’s a classic, classic producer. This is why artwork is so important, music videos are so important to me, all this stuff is tied together in a sense. When you hear Danger Mouse working on a record, you can’t help but hear the drums a certain way.”

The band is still playing instruments, they are still playing their own songs, but people hear it differently.

“There’s a certain influence as a producer,” explains Gourley, “and being the f---ing presence that he is, you have an idea of how he must

sound and that’s why you hear it that way.”

Danger Mouse has a reputation for being a part of songs and albums that sell, but the band has to be able to write an album as well. “It’s the best record we’ve put out. I don’t have any doubts in that,” says Gourley.

With many albums comes ample experience and time to mold and excel in your craft. The band has been able to evolve and grow to make this album what it is today. “We couldn’t have made this record four years ago,” he says. “We couldn’t have made it two years ago.”

Some of the songs on this album have some religious tones to them, most notably the track “Modern Jesus.” When asked about this, Gourley says with a laugh, “I don’t care what anybody wants to believe. If it helps them, then good, it should. That’s what religion’s there for, to help people with their day-to-

day lives.”

He also shares his hate for fear, and the fact that people live with fear. “I think being afraid of things is the shittiest way to live. Let it help you, don’t let it scare the shit out of you.”

With some good advice, Gourley’s ultimate goal is simply to make the best record. “I have never really put anything into this stuff. I never expected to go to Paris or on tour with The Black Keys and travel the world and all those things. I thought if I played in a band, we would play clubs and travel around and that’s it.”

From someone with no expectations for how things might turn out, Portugal. The Man has certainly done pretty well for itself.



***Evil Friends* is out now via Atlantic Records. They will tour in the U.S. and internationally through the fall.**



# ARIEL ALEXIS

## SPOTLIGHT

With her debut album, *A Flightless Bird*, singer-songwriter Ariel Alexis hopes to inspire and connect with her listeners. Growing up in Grapevine, Texas, Alexis was always ready to put on a show for anyone that would watch and listen. Constantly trying to get her friends to be in a band with her or putting on performances for the family, Alexis' aim was to entertain.

She started playing piano at the age of three and from there transitioned to guitar, and that is when her songwriting really began to take off. Since then she has auditioned for the hit television shows *The Glee Project* and *The X Factor*, making it through an impressive number of rounds.

After her experience with reality

television, Alexis decided to come out with her debut album. The album is "playful and youthful," she says.

"I think that *A Flightless Bird* is a really good introduction to who I am as an artist," says Alexis, "and I'm hoping it excites people enough to follow me and see some of the changes that result from me growing up and figuring out who I am as an artist."

Her biggest inspiration is from her late cousin Rory, whose life was cut short on his 21st birthday.

"His passing made me realize it would really be a tragedy to have this talent and passion for music and not make the most of it while I could."

Although Alexis loves to perform and be on stage, she is also studying neuroscience and behavior at Vassar College. During her time there, her

passion for music has grown and she has taken that love and used it toward her education. She even wrote a paper on music and its effects on the human brain.

"There are very few things that make the brain fire or the body respond like music does," she explains. "This is a universal experience, no matter what language you speak or what your cultural background is."

Alexis wants to share her music with people so that they can connect and help one another out.

"I also hope that through my music, people get to know themselves while I am getting to know myself."

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**Her album, *A Flightless Bird*, is out now.**



# JIMMY eat world





***Drummer Zach Lind on change (or lack thereof), success and showing some hometown love.***

WRITTEN BY AMANDA MORAD

Some bands have all the luck. At least that's how a quick review of Jimmy Eat World's history makes it seem. They signed with Capitol Records right out of high school in 1995 and have been with a major ever since.

Jimmy Eat World released its seventh studio album, *Damage*, June 11 on their new label, RCA Records. The long-anticipated follow up to 2010's critically-acclaimed *Invented*, *Damage* is a labor of love produced by Jimmy Eat World and Alain Johannes, recorded in the fall of 2012 at the producer's Los Angeles home studio.

"I think the biggest difference between *Invented* and *Damage* is really the method we used to make the record," Lind says. While not much has changed with the band's creative process over the years, getting the ideas down and distributed is a different beast altogether.

"*Invented* was put together in a way where it took a longer period of time," Lind continues. "We worked in our own studio so the writing process, the arranging process and the recording process all kind of blend into one thing. We

PHOTO BY MICHAEL ELINS

decided for this record it'd be good to try something different."

A change of scenery to Johannes' home studio was enough to change up the process and give the band a different experience altogether. "This time around, each stage of the record kind of had its own defined space," Lind explains. "The writing, the demoing and the recording all kind of happened in a more structured form and I think that altered our approach."

Where the sound of *Damage* is concerned, well, consistency has been one of the traits that's made the band so successful for the last 20 years. Fans can expect Jimmy Eat World's timeless and iconic rock sound, while fanatics will notice the more live show feel of the arrangements.

"We used the tape machine a lot in the recording of this record and that kind of changes your methods, too," Lind says. "It puts more emphasis on the performance and it ended up being a record based on more natural performances and a little more raw, human sounding."

But even with the label switch between *Invented* and *Damage*, the boys of Jimmy Eat World don't feel the least bit pressured to update their signature sound. In fact, according to Lind, they're largely unaware of what that signature sound is.

"With each song, we go into the recording of it thinking of ways to make that song the best it can possibly be and it's just a song-by-song progression," he explains. "We're not necessarily trying to reach for anything in particular; we just try to make every song the best version of itself and don't really think about it beyond that."

"We don't focus a lot of energy on steering the songwriting or the production in a certain direction; it's just that we have a collection of songs, we feel like these songs are the best ones, and we go and record them and each individual song dictates what we do in that song."

So if the focus is on the individual song and not the collection, we might surmise that during the writing process of *Damage*, there could have been some major breaking up going on for songwriter and lead vocalist Jim Adkins. Either way, the consistent

inspiration throughout the record is heartache.

"The thing I particularly like about this record is that it's really relatable," says Lind, empathizing with the more adult break-up sentiments conveyed in *Damage's* lyrical context. "People can listen to it and connect to it because everyone has, at one point or another, experienced the kind of things that Jim talks about in these songs. He does a really good job of giving people a launching-off point to relate to the music."

It's probably safe to venture that relatability has been a key factor in keeping Jimmy Eat World's thriving fan base going for two decades. By keeping the lyrics down-to-earth and easy to connect to, they've managed several chart-topping singles over the years. But how does one know what they're writing is going to connect with people enough to be a "hit"? It's a mystery even to those who've been doing it as long as Lind and the rest of the band have.

"When we're making a record, we're just so close to the project I think a lot of times we don't even know when we've got something special," Lind says. "*Futures* was kind of an interesting record because we didn't think 'Pain' was a single. We weren't even considering that, so when we delivered the record to the record company and they told us 'Pain' would be the first single, we were like 'that's weird,' but it ended up being one of our biggest singles. We get so close to the process that we're not really the best judges of what's going to hit and what's not."

Really, no one is. But that hasn't stopped Jimmy Eat World's success. With consistently high chart positions and plenty of press, the band has never been short on accolades.

"Those things matter in the sense that when we're successful on the commercial level, it enables us to keep doing what we're doing and keep making records and doing what we love to do," Lind explains. "On one hand it's important and something that provides us with more opportunities, but on the other hand I think creatively you have to really check yourself."

"We try to go into the studio and

not worry too much about what the outcome is. You do what you feel like is the best of yourself, you're putting together music you feel confident and strongly about, and then you put that out there and what happens beyond that is out of your control. We don't spend a lot of time thinking, 'let's make this song a bigger hit.' We think, 'let's just make the song better.' If you're chasing something, it's probably gonna be something that you regret down the road."

This is the attitude that's kept Jimmy Eat World afloat through the quick-changing evolution of the music industry. Sure, there's pressure to succeed and continue to build on that success, but Jimmy Eat World deals with it on its own terms.

"The only way we can really respond to pressure is just with willingness to work really hard to go on the road and play lots of shows and do whatever we can to give the record an opportunity to succeed," Lind says.

Back in May, the band did just that by touring their home state of Arizona before *Damage* was released. Hitting less common concert spots like Yuma, Flagstaff, Casa Grande, Wickenburg and Sierra Vista, the mini-tour gave fans outside the big cities a chance to champion the Mesa boys they've been following for years.

"It's something we've always wanted to do, so going into this album cycle we decided to give it a shot, and it was exactly what we thought it'd be," Lind says. "That tour was a lot of fun for us to do, to try different areas and go to places we haven't been to before."

"Exploring on a personal level was cool but also, you're playing in towns that don't hardly ever get any kind of rock shows coming through. It was cool for the people in those settings, too, because they weren't having to drive to Tucson or Phoenix to see the show there. Plus, a lot of people from Phoenix would go roadtripping out to these remote places. It was a great experience."

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**The band's North American tour continues through the fall. Check out dates at [jimmyeatworld.com](http://jimmyeatworld.com).**



PHOTO BY TONY WOOLISCROFT



# KATEE SACKHOFF

BY RACHEL FAYLENE



*"It's been said to me numerous times that people are shocked that I'm a girl, that I wear heels and wear dresses, and that I'm really girly."*

Carrying an extensive list of successes, Katee Sackhoff sees no stopping point in her career. She is perhaps originally known for her role as Captain Kara "Starbuck" Thrace on *Battlestar Galactica*, but has since associated her name with more varying works.

Dabbling in both the film and television industries has proved healthy for her career, but it comes with many differing challenges from both fields. A slight sense of stability can be found in working with a television series, but with that hope comes a better understanding of what it means to deliver a better show with each passing season. The show's future is dependent on its ability to keep and gain followers each season. That is certainly the case with Sackhoff's latest series, A&E's *Longmire*, which is currently in its second season.

"It's a bit scary because you've got some big shoes from the first season to fill and you're trying to up the bar, so you know it's exciting, but I think that to make a successful show you have to make a phenomenal second season or you'll lose fans and you won't have a third," says Sackhoff. "I think it's kind of like an artist coming out with their second album."

Sackhoff understands that the pressure to do better is all across the board in the world of arts. She notes the importance of recognizing creativity from those around her, even outside of her own practice.

"Music has been a part of my life since I was a little kid and I love music. I love new artists, I love supporting new artists, I love supporting local artists," she explains. "I'm obsessed with music, so it's something I really enjoy."

Adding to her lists of favorites, she dives into her childhood pleasures, giving insight to her career choice.

"My dad kind of raised me on science fiction and action movies, so it's just been a part of my soul since I was really little," she admits. "Nothing gets me going like a good action movie still to this day."

And while her personal preference includes watching, as well as acting in, the more lively films that rush the adrenaline, expanding the types of roles she

plays is something she finds equally as exciting.

"I try to change it up every once in a while and try to do something that nobody would expect just to challenge myself."

Looking into the list of her many projects throughout the years makes it evident that Sackhoff is a concrete professional in the entertainment business. From film to television to video games, she maintains a blossoming career. Many of her roles have been for aggressive, more masculine characters, prompting fans to connect these less-than-feminine attributes to her personal life. Fans are taken aback when they find this assumption untrue.

"I think the thing that I've known from very early on in my career is that what you think someone's going to be is the opposite and completely different," she explains. "It's interesting because I'm used to people having preconceived notions about me and it's always interesting to see people's reactions when they meet me for the first time or talk to me because they think, and it's been said to me numerous times, that people are shocked that I'm a girl, that I wear heels and wear dresses, and that I'm really girly."

Being surprised by your favorite celebrities' real life stature may not always be a pleasant experience. Sackhoff is no stranger to being rudely awakened to this reality and has since learned that personal interaction is the only way to judge, while also pointing to her newest co-star, Vin Diesel, with whom she shares the big screen in the new *Riddick* film, which is slated to arrive later this summer.

"I have these ideas of celebrities and think they're going to be the nicest people in the world and you meet them and you're like, 'You're an asshole!'," she admits. But as for Diesel, she says that having worked with the blockbuster actor-producer has proven he's definitely one of the good guys. "So you never know what you're going to get."

Whether it's the industry and lifestyle that's to blame for these sometimes unfortunate truths is hard to tell. Sackhoff has managed to keep true to herself and

prioritize the things that are most important to her. Balancing opportunity and personal life is something that she has begun to master.

Sackhoff shares the secret to staying sane with such a hectic work life and how to feel normal while under the spotlight: Have a healthy private life. She is currently engaged to her longtime boyfriend and film producer, Scott Niemeyer, making schedules even more complicated. Making time for the people that really matter is her number one focus.

"When you spend too long away from the people that you love, you start to—or at least I start to—retreat into my own self and I start to get depressed at work because you work long hours and you get tired," she states. "And when you don't connect with the people that matter to you, everything seems to get magnified. You get a little bit more tired, a little bit more stressed, a little bit more everything."

Naturally, during her time away from the cameras, she likes to mellow out and be with her family and loved ones. Sackhoff admits that the only thing on her mind after spending so much time away from home is actually being home.

"My sheets seem to be crisper and colder and my room seems to be a little bit warmer than every place else I've ever been," she says. "I love being home with my dog and actually being able to have time to take him to the park and not have it be a babysitter taking him to the park."

Fans can rest assured knowing that Sackhoff's desire to be a homebody when given the chance is in no way a permanent plan for her anytime soon.

"When I moved to California I never dreamed—I prayed that this would be my life—but I never actually dreamed that I'd have the opportunities that I have, and every job since that first job is just the icing on the cake."

Sackhoff will continue to live the life she always wanted, just with a healthy amount of dog and nap time at home.

**The season finale of *Longmire* airs July 29 on A&E.**



PHOTO BY ELIOT LEE HAZEL

# CAPITAL CITIES

SAFE, SOUND AND SWEEPING THE CHARTS LIKE A TIDAL WAVE

Words by Eli Provenzano

**CAPITAL CITIES ARE A TESTAMENT** to how influential the Internet can be in terms of connecting music to its audience. Ryan Merchant and Sebu Simonian both caught the music bug at an early age, and never looked back. This indie-pop duo is igniting a dance craze all over the world with their hit single “Safe and Sound,” which is featured on their new album, *In a Tidal Wave of Mystery*.

If the music video for “Safe and Sound” is any indication, Capital Cities not only appreciate the history of music, but they also infuse their work with their obvious passion and drive. Their desire to make each song as perfect as it can be may be tedious, but it’s well worth it.

“When we wrote [‘Safe and Sound’], we felt like we wrote a good song,” says Simonian. “We were excited about it, so because of that, we wanted to make sure that the production of the song was just right. It actually took us almost two years to get it right. We demoed it at first and then we fleshed it out and it was a lot more rock, and the tempo was even a little bit slower. We just kept at it and then finally we ended up with the current production, which is a lot more electronic than how we first started and we added a trumpeter. We just kind of experimented with it until we felt like it was just right. We had high hopes that it would spread organically and it did. First on the internet and then radio stations started picking it up, so yeah, we’re excited about it!”

The music video for “Safe and Sound” features a dance-off between genres from key points in music his-

tory, such as break dancing vs. the tango. The video’s eclectic combination of music mirrors the pair’s own various tastes.

“I think we listen to all sorts of things,” Merchant admits, “I love Fleetwood Mac, I love Phoenix, I love Air, Daft Punk, Michael Jackson. I mean, it’s kind of all over the place. Joni Mitchell, I love Joni Mitchell. She’s one of my favorite songwriters, so kind of a broad spectrum.”

After doing most of their own promotion in the beginning, Capital Cities was thrilled to partner with a major label such as Capitol Records.

“I think we’re definitely in a unique situation because we did a lot of the leg work for a really long time, so we had some good legs going,” Simonian reveals. “It was great for us because they came in wanting to partner with us as opposed to taking over like a traditional record label often does. It’s a very collaborative experience with them and they’re really focused on helping us do the right thing with pushing the music properly, creatively, artistically and in a dedicated way.”

“It’s been a very good experience—not the nightmare major label experience that you read about,” adds Merchant.

Now that they have their wonderfully unique sound just the way they want it, this dance-invoking duo has no problem sharing the wealth. When it comes to collaborations, Capital Cities are a lot more concerned with the integrity of the song than the famous name attached to it.

“I think the collaboration should be done for the sake of the song as

*“I think the collaboration should be done for the sake of the song as opposed to just throwing someone on the track because you want to say, ‘featuring this person.’ Whatever the collaboration is, it should really enhance the song. That’s kind of how we approach it.”*

opposed to just throwing someone on the track because you want to say, ‘featuring this person,’” Merchant shares. “Whatever the collaboration is, it should really enhance the song. That’s kind of how we approach it. The singers that we work with, they don’t have to be famous. If they have an amazing voice, that’s what we want for a track because that’s what important to us—does the song sound good? We don’t care about just having a name there, but that’s it ... Whatever is appropriate for the song is a good collaboration.”

With a global tour stretching through at least November, Capital Cities will be gracing the stage with their fun-loving, out-of-this-world music that will have audiences all over the world on their feet and ready to dance.

“It’s been a gradual climb, so we’re just hoping that it just gets better and better,” says Simonian.

***In a Tidal Wave of Mystery*, is available now on Capitol Records. ■**



LAURA  
MARLING

In the average teenage girl's life, high school years are spent thinking about prom and SAT's or ACT's, college, and most of all, boy-friends. But for British-born Laura Marling, her life was anything but average.

"My father was a musician and I left school when I was 16 and that was it," says Marling. "That's what I was doing... My dad runs a recording studio. It wasn't so alien to my parents that I might go off and become a musician. My dad had taught me guitar. I'm not good at anything else so I was quite lucky."

At 16, Marling left her nervous but supportive parents behind and set out for London to chase her dreams.

"I was quite a sensible 16-year-old," Marling says. "I don't think I was in danger of going off the rails. I joined a band. I was singing background vocals in a band that was touring and I loved it. I loved every minute of it. I was lucky. I fell in with a nice crowd. It wasn't scary or dark, really."

Was it luck or was it just the inevitable rise of a talented young girl? With four albums under her belt (the most recent having released in May), Marling, who is now in her 20s, speaks with a confidence and a wisdom that is beyond her years.

For example, in the past five years and with the release of her albums, Marling says that she's learned that instinct is best.

"Whatever your instinct is, it's usually right. And remember that even though it's difficult, sometimes you don't always have to do what people want you to do," she says. "You have to find a balance between being difficult and following your instinct."

Perhaps it was instinct that led Marling out of the U.K. and brought her to L.A. less than a year ago. Marling says that she had lived in London since she was 16 and needed a change of scene.

"It was time to go." The decision to relocate was more personal than anything else, she says.

"It was nothing really to do with my career," says Marling. "I have a couple of friends who lived out there and out east. It's more of a place to relax than it is to work, that's for sure."

So how does she like California's favorite city?

"I like it very well," she says. "I mean, obviously, it's nice cause of the weather, but you know, last week I drove down from Portland all the way to L.A. and it was beautiful."

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But Marling says even though she misses Europe, she loves where she lives now and she cannot compare L.A. to the U.K. "They are two completely different lifestyles."

While she could not compare physical locations, she had no problem comparing U.K. and L.A. audiences.

"They're very, very different," she says. "American audiences are very warm and they have a lot of energy, which is nice if you keep the show going. English audiences are very, they're not cold by any means, but they're very subdued. They're more willing to be subdued than they are to be over excitable... It's either high energy or relaxing flow energy so it's just makes a different show."

*Once I Was An Eagle*, Marling's most recent album, was set to release in February but was pushed back till May due to issues with the record company. So what was her process in developing this album?

"I wrote it and took it to my produc-

ers who I worked with for the last three albums and we made it very quickly and quietly in a tiny studio in the west country of England," says Marling. "It was a very easy, very natural process. It was going to be a long record [so] we decided to do it very cut off from anybody else so it was just the three of us in the studio."

With 16 new songs on this album, Marling says it was the "same writer, but it's a different story." She does not deny that her lyrical content is reserved. Listeners do not get much insight into her personal life or experiences but it will always be that way, she says, because that's just the way that she writes.

Where does her lyrical inspiration come from then? Marling says it's from real life. "Lots of things," she says. "It's the combination of lots of things, the things that are all inspiring to everybody, I imagine. Like books and movies and printed albums and strange people and mad people and interesting people; they're all very inspiring."

In addition to singing her original music, Marling was recently seen covering Bruce Springsteen's "Dancing in the Dark" with fellow singer-songwriter, Eddie Berman.

"Eddie's an old friend of mine and he's a phenomenal musician," she says. "He plays that song on his set all the time and I just happened to be there and I sang on it."

Does that mean we can expect to hear more collaborations with other artists? Probably not.

"I'm not much of a collaborator," she says. "I mean, I like singing on people's things, I like watching live music, but I'm not much of a collaborator really."

Fortunately for us, Marling's music is satisfying enough on its own.

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**For more information on Laura Marling or to listen to her music, visit [www.lauramarling.com](http://www.lauramarling.com)**

Hailing from New Albany, Ind., Houndmouth is a country/folk/alternative rock group with a diverse sound and the ability to win over a broad range of music fans. Currently promoting their June 4 release, *From the Hills Below the City*, the group seems poised to earn their keep in today's music landscape.

With a style that is rich in country tones, Houndmouth extends the parameters of the genre by seamlessly

including a variety of singers and instrument work. Many fans were first turned on to the group when they gave an entertaining performance of their catchy single, "On the Road," on TBS's *Conan*. With the lead vocals switching between male and female, culminating in seamless harmonies, listeners can't help being easily hooked.

Their entire album is more than worth a listen, offering traces of The Lumineers throughout the set, per-

haps just picking up on the wealth of talent shared between the members. Composed of Katie Toupin, Matt Myers, Zak Appleby and Shane Cody, this group of performers is ready to make their mark and become a household name.

Be on the lookout, as they are currently touring North America and Europe.

**For more information on the band, go to [houndmouth.com](http://houndmouth.com).**



**HOUNDMOUTH**

## THE SOUNDS YOU NEED TO HEAR



If you're a fan of rap music, but haven't yet heard of Action Bronson, you are in for a big surprise. This 29-year-old from Queens, N.Y., is poised to take the scene by storm with his atypical appearance and more than formidable skills on the microphone. You will be impressed from the very first listen.

Ever since he self-released his 2011 debut mixtape, *Bon Appetit....B----*, his career has been on an upward trajectory. Point blank, this guy is large and he is white—perhaps two charac-

teristics that fans don't expect when hearing his voice for the first time. But this homegrown marketability, backed with unbelievable skill, has proven to be a recipe for success for Bronson.

For those familiar with the late Big PUN, Bronson's voice seems to fall into a similar category, leaving listeners with the feeling that they've hit on something great. As it turns out, his peers tend to believe the same thing. Bronson has appeared on tracks with A\$AP Rocky, Ken-

drick Lamar, Mac Miller and many more. In the same sense, his last album, *Saab Stories*, had features from Raekwon, Wiz Khalifa and others.

Pay close attention to Bronson moving forward, as he promises to hit airwaves in the not-so-distant future. Just don't be surprised when the face behind your next favorite song doesn't look like you imagined it would.

**For more on Action Bronson, go to [actionbronson.com](http://actionbronson.com).**

## THE SOUNDS YOU NEED TO HEAR



### ERICA JORDAN

**E**rica Jordan is a singer/songwriter from Southern California that has just begun her road to musical stardom. With a sound that touches on everything from Lil' Kim to vintage Ashanti, she seems destined to find a home on your playlists in the not-so-distant future.

With her self-titled debut album, Erica Jordan introduces herself as a lyricist on the opening track, "Introducing First." At first listen, fans get the idea that she is a rapper through and through, but as the album continues, more layers of her

music are revealed. She cites a range of influencers to her sound, including: Anita Baker, Cake, Shania Twain and more. Eclectic, sure, but her music shows traces of them all.

Slower tracks like "Organic" evoke memories of Murder, Inc.-era Ashanti, with her vocals falling perfectly atop a hip-hop beat. Not a one trick pony, Jordan's music comes across as nothing short of a pleasant surprise as she impresses time and time again. The album grows more comfortable as it continues,

proving to be a complete top-to-bottom listen; uncommon for such a young artist.

Fans of hip-hop and R&B will immediately love Jordan's style, as producer Bryan Fischer put together an album that shines from beginning to finish. As she matures, her music will do the same, offering an opportunity to watch her fully bloom as an artist. Be on the lookout.

**To listen to Erica Jordan's album or follow her latest updates, go to [EricaJordanCurry.com](http://EricaJordanCurry.com).**

**F**ounded in 2010, the Wild Feathers is a group from Nashville, Tenn., that challenges the boundaries of average country music. Mixing a blend of vocals and instrument work, the band creates a sound that is anchored in the roots of country, but provides a complete listen that appeals to fans of all genres.

Through coincidence and happenstance, the four members of The Wild Feathers came together in Austin, Texas, and began their journey to where they are today. Ricky Young,

Joel King, Taylor Burns and Preston Wimberly come from different musical backgrounds and each experienced their own musical path, but blend together in complete cohesion to create a unique experience for listeners. Using elements of folk, rock, blues and an all-over country vibe, each song proves to be its own experience and promises to earn fans amongst a variety of musical backgrounds.

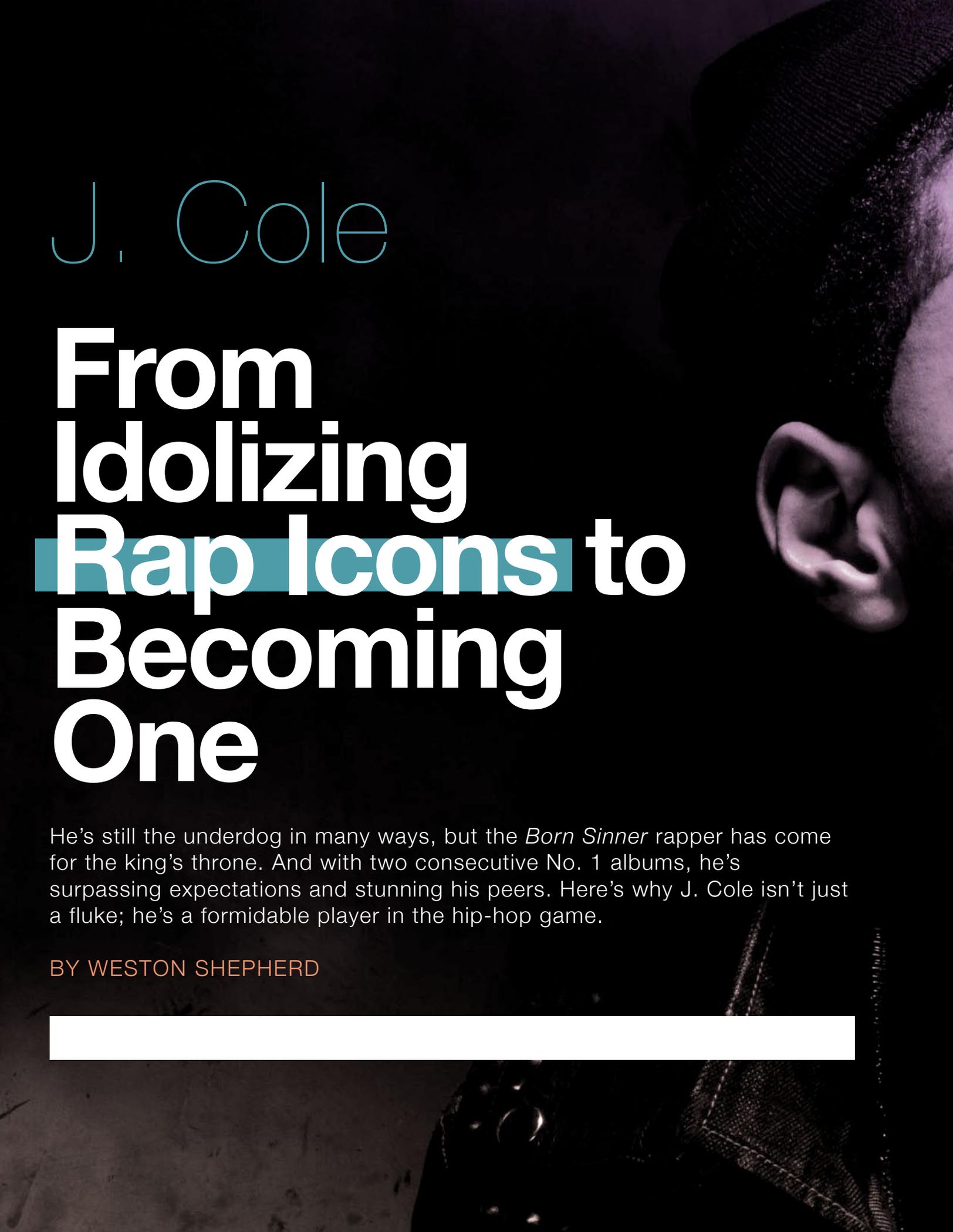
Although the band has yet to release an album, The Wild Feathers is signed to Warner Bros. Records and

has been on stage with Delta Spirit, The Heavy and was even a part of Paul Simon's 2011 fall tour. If bands are also judged by the company they keep, then this act is on track for great success in the future.

It is promised that fans of country music (and many others!) will fall in love with the carefree sounds and musical stylings of this up-and-coming group.

**For more on The Wild Feathers, visit [www.thewildfeathers.com](http://www.thewildfeathers.com).**





J. Cole

# From Idolizing Rap Icons to Becoming One

He's still the underdog in many ways, but the *Born Sinner* rapper has come for the king's throne. And with two consecutive No. 1 albums, he's surpassing expectations and stunning his peers. Here's why J. Cole isn't just a fluke; he's a formidable player in the hip-hop game.

BY WESTON SHEPHERD

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PHOTO COURTESY OF ROC NATION/COLUMBIA RECORDS

I was 11 years old when I got my first rap album, a cassette tape version of JAY Z's *Vol. 2... Hard Knock Life*. My dad bought it at a local record store and made sure to grab the explicit version, too. My mom was to never find out about this, and she didn't. It stayed hidden inside my backpack, only to be removed when I found time alone in my room—with over-the-ear headphones and the lights turned off so my parents would think I was sleeping. To this day, I can still remember every lyric to every song on the album.

I realized early in the JAY Z album that there's a feeling a good rap song provides, a feeling that can't adequately be explained. As a fan of rap, you spend much time waiting for that next artist to come along and remind you of why you love the genre so much in the first place. The entire hip-hop world is a complicated subculture, its own little community that tries to find balance between cliché club-bangers and artists still carrying the original idea of the genre in their music. Those who love rap at its core don't compare real hip-hop to much of what is heard on today's radio stations. There's a difference. A different feeling. Long story short: If Biggie and Pac were still alive, they wouldn't be collaborating with the majority of today's popular artists.

So we're clear: J. Cole isn't supposed to be where he is right now. At least not at his current level of success. Rap's underdog, he approached his latest effort with an attitude that can only be described as "nothing to lose." When Kanye West announced he was releasing his album, *Ye-zus*, a week prior to Cole's long-planned release date, he simply moved his date up to match.

On his decision to release

his album the same day as West, he told *Billboard*, "I worked too hard to come a week later after Kanye West drops an amazing album. It'd be like, 'Oh, and J. Cole dropped too, a week later.' Nah. I'm going to see him on that date."

But to understand how Cole ended up battling for rap's heavyweight belt, you must first understand where he came from. Before the fame, before a GRAMMY nomination and long before *Born Sinner*, Jermaine Lamarr Cole was a military child born in Germany, soon relocated to Fayetteville, N.C., and aware from an early age that rap was meant to be a large part of his life. While most 12-year-olds are busy with sixth grade, Cole began telling stories through his rhymes—citing Tupac Shakur as one of his greatest influencers.

With nothing but his rhyme book, he embarked on a journey that many begin but few ever finish. Notorious for never running out of lyrics, it wasn't until his mother bought him an 808 machine that he additionally began producing his own beats. Rapping and producing under the name "Therapist," he honed his skills and cultivated his love for the craft while obtaining his degree from St. John's University in New York City. No slouch, he graduated magna cum laude while also balancing his music.

Turning points exist in every plotline, however, and make-or-break moments often determine whether the story continues or abruptly ends. Soon after graduation in 2007, he found himself outside of JAY Z's Roc the Mic studio in Manhattan, hopeful he could provide beats for Jay's upcoming album, *American Gangster*. He waited for three hours before getting his chance to speak,





Photo Courtesy of BET

although the reception from Hov was far from what he hoped it would be.

Cole still remembers the moment JAY Z arrived. “The Phantom finally comes around the corner,” he recalled in a recent interview. “It’s raining, by the way. We’ve been in the rain ... Someone gets out the car in front of him just to open his door. That was their job, to get out their car, come to his car and open his door. He hops out. I’m froze. I don’t really know what to say. I’m like, ‘Yo, Jay, I got this for you.’ He’s like, ‘What is that? What are you doing?’ I’m like, ‘*American Gangster* beat CD.’ I can’t really speak and he’s like, ‘Man, I don’t want that shit, man!’”

Upset but undeterred, he accepted this setback and continued forth with his dream. The bad taste in his mouth from the JAY Z experience would be short-lived, as his work ethic earned him further opportunities to impress the rap mogul. Founded in 2008 by JAY Z himself, Roc Nation is a full-service entertainment and management company that now boasts clientele like Rihanna, Shakira and others, but the very first client signed was J. Cole in 2009. The forward momentum he gained at that point in time changed his career forever, as 2010 served as his official entrance into the limelight.

Cole was soon named to hip-hop magazine *XXL*’s 2010 Top 10 Freshman list, an honor he shared with the likes of Wiz Khalifa, Big Sean and others who are still very much in the game today. He then released the now cult-classic mixtape, *Friday Night Lights*, which featured fellow up-and-coming stars, Drake and Wale. He parlayed this success into a U.K. tour with Drake and set himself up perfectly for his first album, *Cole World: The Sideline Story*.

Released Sept. 27, 2011, *Cole World* was greatly anticipated among the rap community. Selling 218,000 copies in its first week, it was the No. 1 album on the Billboard 200 and was certified Gold by December of the same year. The album featured guest spots by JAY Z, Drake, Trey Songz and Missy Elliott, and his place in rap’s conversation was solidified with the success of the album. But as many musicians can attest, doing something once is great. Duplicating success is ultimately the name of the game.

When you fast forward to 2013, the landscape of rap has changed, yet it’s very much stayed the same. JAY Z remains the unconquered—though sometimes self-proclaimed—king. Eminem is still lurking with the occasional album and Kanye West has experienced massive success in the role of JAY Z’s right-hand man/rap-

idly expanding entrepreneur. Newcomers Kendrick Lamar and A\$AP Rocky are experiencing a rise to prominence, while Drake has quickly turned himself into one of the most relevant artists on earth. Rick Ross’ Maybach Music Group sports a stable of talent, including the popular Wale, and there’s a gang of bandits on the outside in the form of Tyler, The Creator’s Odd Future. Lil Wayne is still Lil Wayne, Kid Cudi has his fans and there are countless more I can’t even mention. Long story short? The top is crowded these days.

Among such talent, the intention for J. Cole wasn’t unlike that of many artists with overwhelmingly successful debut albums: Avoid the sophomore slump. He had an outstanding 2012, a year that included a GRAMMY nomination for Best New Artist and a collection of other award nominations from the BET Music Awards, American Music Awards and more. But staying relevant has been the biggest puzzle musicians have faced for years, and Cole was no different. He released two free EPs in 2013 prior to *Born Sinner*’s debut, with *Truly Yours* dropping on Feb. 13 and *Truly Yours II* becoming available on April 30. With fans and critics alike giving the EPs positive reviews, the stage was set for the arrival of his second album.

When the long-awaited day, June 18, came for Cole’s *Born Sinner* and West’s *Yeezus*, Mac Miller rounded out the rap release trifecta with his sophomore album, *Watching Movies with the Sound Off*. The perceived reality of this event was that West would easily secure the No. 1 spot on the Billboard 200, with Cole finishing a distant second and Miller at No. 3. That belief held true for the most part, as all three releases sold more than 100,000 copies in the first week. The difference between Cole and West was far less dramatic than originally projected, however, with Cole selling 297,922 copies to West’s 328,800. It seemed West’s sales projections lowered each day of the week, as Cole’s slowly inched higher and higher. A power struggle at rap’s mountaintop became ever apparent.

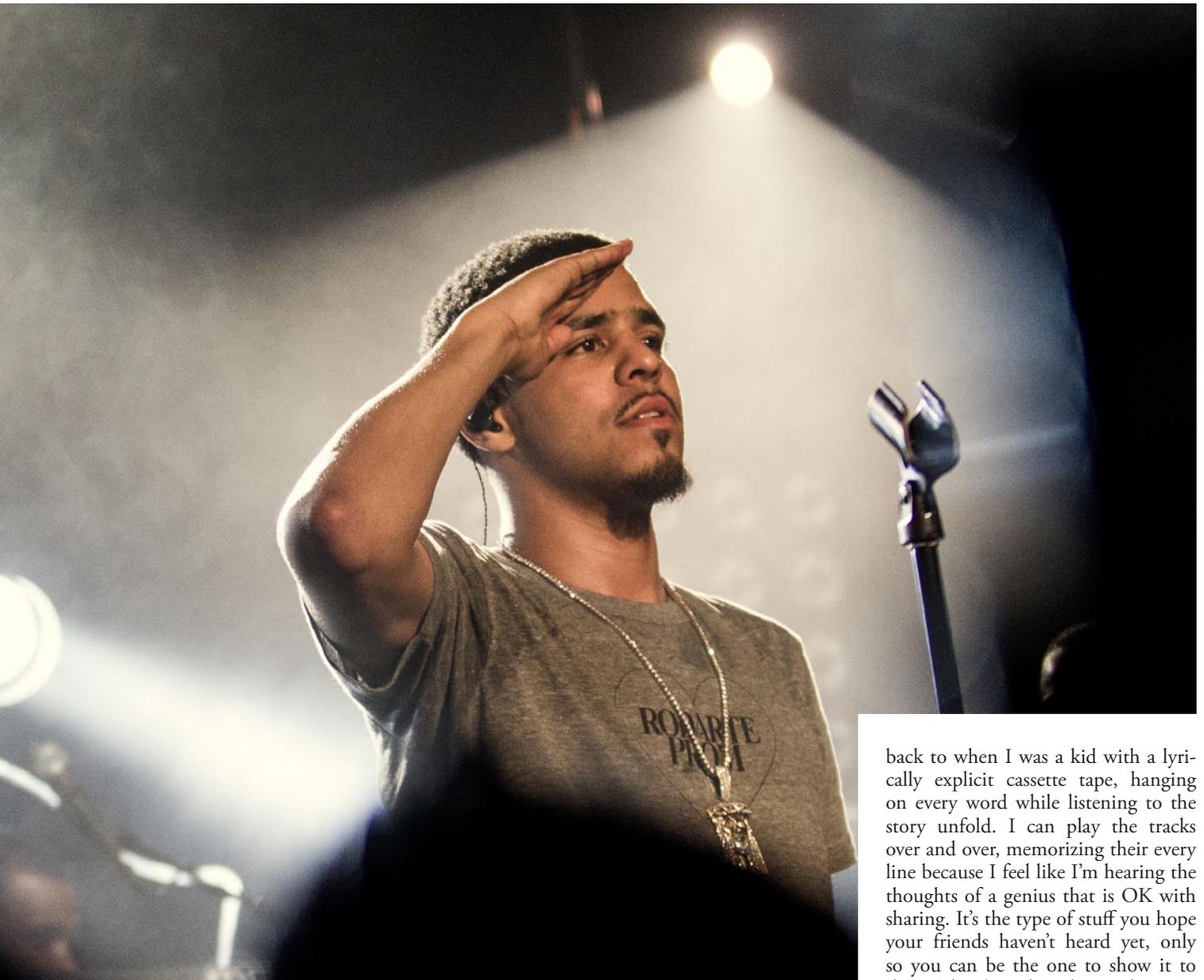
Rap has continued to dominate the Billboard 200 in the weeks since June 18, as Wale upped the ante with his June 25 release of *The Gifted*. He would go on to secure the No. 1 spot in his first week, with Cole following at No. 2 and West sliding to No. 3. The following week, the first time rap has held down the top three positions on the Billboard 200 for three weeks in a row, Cole saw his project rise to top slot on the list, while simultaneously pushing his



total records sold past West’s total sales. As of this writing, Cole has sold 439,000 copies of *Born Sinner*, which is 8,000 more units than *Yeezus*.

In all honesty, Cole is exactly what was needed to dethrone Kanye West from his recent streak of extremely successful debuts. As West continues to tamper with his sound, constantly trying new things in the name of “art,” he has also grown a more angry brand of music that has been a turnoff to some of his most loyal fans. An album with no true radio singles, *Yeezus* simply lacks the cohesion and likability of *Born Sinner*. It’s as if J. Cole brewed the perfect storm at just the right time.

And although J. Cole’s mentor, JAY Z, will soon take over the No. 1 spot with his *Magna Carta Holy Grail* album, even that comes as sort of a bitter pill to swal-



low. Always the trailblazer, Jay used a partnership with the Samsung Galaxy to provide a free copy of the album to the first one million downloaders of the “JAY Z Magna Carta” app. As awesome as it sounds, the entire thing has been chalked up to a data mining operation, and many feel as though he sold out his fans in the name of more publicity and sponsorship. Not to mention the sentiment that JAY Z’s latest set is perhaps one of his weakest offerings in recent memory.

All the while, J. Cole continues to win over more fans with what appears to be the

most genuine approach to stardom that one could muster. While the genre’s typical heavyweights begin to slip up, his music comes across as a breath of fresh air to rap fans that have been waiting for an album that is good from top to bottom. More likely to rap about his shortcomings than rub his stardom in your face, his music is likable because it’s honest and delivered in a way that makes fans feel like he means what he’s saying. Even when you can’t exactly relate to his words, you feel like you can relate just because he’s explaining it so well. Even among mas-

sive success, he manages to retain the underdog feel. And everyone loves the underdog.

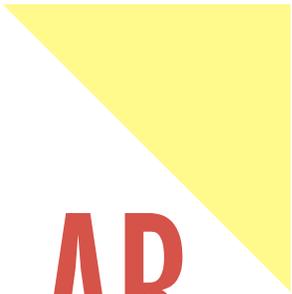
All of this brings me back to my original point, a realization that I came to while listening to that JAY Z album back in 1998. Before data mining schemes, Beyoncé and owning NBA teams, JAY Z captivated me because he was just so...cool. It’s like *College Dropout*-era Kanye, or Dr. Dre’s *2001*—the type of stuff you can play 10 years later and still vibe to. That’s what good rap is supposed to be like.

J. Cole’s music takes me

back to when I was a kid with a lyrically explicit cassette tape, hanging on every word while listening to the story unfold. I can play the tracks over and over, memorizing their every line because I feel like I’m hearing the thoughts of a genius that is OK with sharing. It’s the type of stuff you hope your friends haven’t heard yet, only so you can be the one to show it to them. There’s nothing better than giving someone their next favorite song, and that’s the type of emotional connection Cole hopes his fans find in his music. Luckily for him (and us), that is the exact type of connection he provides.

Because rap is rap and music is music, fans will soon focus on the next big album and the conversation will start all over again about who holds the crown. Drake’s upcoming project is on the horizon, as the rap community still absorbs June’s huge releases. In the alternate universe that is rap, however, one constant truth is that things may not always be exactly as they seem. The summer of Kanye? It didn’t happen. And as J. Cole continues to steal the momentum, a shift in power that seemed entirely improbable has already begun right before our eyes. ■





# SKYLAR GREY

## THIS IS HER TIME— FINALLY

By Jonathan Robles

She's certainly no stranger to the music industry. She's written hits for Eminem, Rihanna, Christina Aguilera, T.I., Zedd and others. She's been featured on popular tracks such as "I Need a Doctor" with Dr. Dre and Eminem, "Words I Never Said" with Lupe Fiasco, and "Coming Home" with Diddy-Dirty Money, a song she co-wrote with the likes of Jermaine Cole and Jay-Z. Yet Skylar Grey is only now receiving her proper introduction to the world, her debut album, *Don't Look Down*, having released this month.

It seems as if fans have been waiting forever for this record, which has been teased since about the time of her 2011 GRAMMY performance with Dr. Dre and Eminem. But Grey, acknowledging the relief of finally releasing the project, believes the wait has been worth it.

"It does seem like it's been a while," she admits. "But it was important to get it right. I think I was nervous—that's part of it. I'm a perfectionist, like a lot of artists, and you just overthink and overanalyze everything. Every song, every lyric, the title. But I'm ready just to have it out there, and out of my hands."

Part of the challenge facing Grey, born Holly Brook Hafermann, rests in her identity. She has previously released music—albeit mostly under the radar—as Holly Brook, and she and her mother performed as a folk duo called Generations. Despite eventually signing to Linkin Park's Machine Shop Records, her career stalled until 2006's "Where'd You Go," a collaboration with Fort Minor, the side project of Linkin Park frontman Mike Shinoda. Since then, Grey has eased her way into the hip-hop scene, her

name now being associated with some of rap's greatest MCs.

She's played folk, jazz, hip-hop and just about everything in between. But with all that experience and such a wide range of influences, defining Skylar Grey and wrapping it all into one perfect commercial record has been no small task. "The hard part is you're putting out a debut album at 27 years old," the singer explains. "I kind of knew what I wanted to do, but I'm not just a fresh, young pop star. I definitely didn't want to be one of those artists who puts out an album of bubblegum pop at 27, and then what do you do for the second record? You're 30 by then. It just doesn't work. I didn't want that to be me. And it can be kind of overwhelming trying to figure out how you're going to present yourself."

Although Grey was still working out the details for the record earlier this year, some of the material has already been brewing for a long time. In fact, "Final Warning" was written at the same time as her mammoth songwriting hit, "Love the Way You Lie." Grey had secluded herself in a cabin in Oregon, escaping a battle with her label and a bitter relationship. She began pouring a very raw flux of emotions into wrathful lyrics that eventually became two murderous tracks. The young songwriter would soon learn a very valuable lesson that she took with her into this new record.

"'Love the Way You Lie' opened my eyes in many ways," she recalls. "Suddenly I was getting calls from every direction. These people are expecting you to create a hit for them. Your name is linked to that song, and everyone thinks you can duplicate that for them, like magic. It was frustrating at times. I walked out of sessions because they didn't get it. That song came from a very real place for me. I had no idea it would be the song that it is now."

On the other hand, the experience has likely prepared her for this moment, when she is not only the songwriter but the performer. "It helps keep me balanced," says Grey. "Because I know that not every song is going to explode. I'm not expecting overnight success. I understand that this is just a step in the right direction."

It certainly doesn't hurt that she's got one of the most powerful names

in music backing her emphatically as she launches her solo project. Not only has Eminem brought Grey in to work on his own music, but he lent his vocals to her record, which is also executively produced by the rapper.

"It's still kind of hard to believe," says Grey about Eminem's decision to take such an active role behind-the-scenes in *Don't Look Down*. "I have so much respect for him as an artist and a producer. It's definitely a boost to my confidence having his support and getting his feedback. It can be scary being the new artist trying to step out and do this, but it's very affirming to know he has my back."

While Eminem's involvement is a sure sign of validation for any artist, Grey still remembers being in disbelief the first time he complimented her music. "It completely caught me by surprise," she recalls. "He told me my stuff was 'fucking amazing.' I was just like, I cannot believe this. He's fucking Eminem. To hear him say that—to hear him say anything at all about my music—was just weird and crazy."

On the surface, the combination of Eminem and Grey might seem "weird and crazy" to some, but at their core, the two artists are more alike than not. Their music reflects their life in very raw, uncensored ways. Although different in style, they both pull on heart-breaking experiences to create gut-wrenching art that is impossible to ignore.

Of course, it remains to be seen the long-term effects of Grey's latest body of work, and after a series of delays, she admits "it's impossible to predict when the 'right moment' is." But perhaps this stage of her career is less about getting the timing right and more about showcasing her true talent. Appropriately named *Don't Look Down*, the album is the singer's opportunity to finally jump into the spotlight unabashedly.

"When you put so much of who you are into an album, part of you worries about how people will respond," she confesses. "Sometimes it's hard to let go. It's scary and exciting—but mostly exciting. I can definitely say I'm ready."

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***Don't Look Down* is out now via KIDindaKORNER/Interscope.**



PHOTO BY BENNY HADDAD

# DAVID ANDERS

TV'S FAVORITE VILLIAN GETS ROUGH IN NEW ROLE

BY MERLYN HAMILTON

American born, thought to be British, actor David Anders has been keeping himself quite busy these days. Perhaps you saw him on *Alias* or *Heroes* or even *Vampire Diaries*. Even though the list of Anders' appearances is plentiful, he can currently be seen on ABC's *Once Upon a Time* or on USA's *Necessary Roughness*. There is no doubt that Anders is definitely doing what he loves.

Upon moving to L.A. several years back, Anders admits that he originally came with the intention of doing comedy. But since that hasn't happened yet, Anders can be found comfortably and professionally playing the role of the villain, the bad guy.

"I think playing the villain is more fun than playing the good guy, the hero," Anders says. Who can argue with fun?

But sometimes playing the villain will result in invested fans thinking that he is actually a villain. Anders recounts one of these incidents saying, "Someone has actually said, 'I don't like you and I don't know why,' looking at me critically. [I know it's] because you don't like my character... that's not me." For instance, people often assume Anders in British because his villainous roles thus far have called for an English accent. He just happens to put it on quite well.

Currently seen alongside John Stamos in *Necessary Roughness*, Anders

says it's great to work with him.

"He's absolutely a delight, all we did was laugh," Anders says in reference to Stamos.

But with all the roles that Anders has been seen playing, he says that when deciding to take a part, "you hear a lot of no's and I'll say a lot of no's to roles that I just don't think are right for me... There are a lot of factors that go into it."

As a former actor on *24*, Anders expresses enthusiasm for the show's return next summer, as well as his love of *Arrested Development*.

"I think it's great for shows like that, that had such a huge cult following. [The return of] *Arrested Development* has been a dream for me because that was my favorite show in the history of television. These 14-15 episodes that just came out have just been a wet dream for me and for all the other fans that love it. I think *24* is the same. Why wouldn't you? Why wouldn't you bang out some episodes to that fan base that you left behind when it ended?"

Anders also mentioned hearing rumors of *Heroes* coming back as well. Like *Arrested Development*, perhaps this will be another Netflix hit.

It is undeniable that there is a shift in how viewers are watching television shows. The trends have changed, making cable and Netflix more competitive than ever.

"It seems like the tides are changing," Anders says. "The whole landscape has changed. Netflix has all this funny, original content, and Hulu does and Amazon does. It is going in that direction but there are always going to be network shows ... It's a cool thing, I think, because you can just hang out and binge watch all these episodes at once or in a couple of days and be done with it."

With such a busy schedule, Anders says that he balances the down time vs. the busy times.

"You clock in, you clock out--it's a job, but it's a fun job," Anders says. "It's nice to do something that you love. The schedule can be crazy, the traveling can be crazy, and I do a lot of it, which can be fun, but it can also take the life out of you sometimes... You find your avenues to ground yourself and keep you even."

With a satisfied and level head, Anders addresses the future optimistically.

"I'm completely content with my career right now, but I've got friends like Bradley Cooper and Zach Quinto who are movie stars now and of course, I want to do that for sure," he says. "But you know, it all comes in time."

**For more information on David Anders, follow him on Twitter: [twitter.com/questionanders](https://twitter.com/questionanders)**

# Surfer Blood

YOU CAN'T KEEP  
A GOOD BAND DOWN.

THE FLORIDA ROCKERS  
MOVE PAST BUMPS IN THE ROAD  
AS THEY AIM FOR THE TOP



PHOTO BY FRANK MADDOCKS

## FROM THE SUNNY SHORES OF FLORIDA,

West Palm Beach's very own Surfer Blood made its way into blogs, festivals and playlists when John Paul Pitts (lead vocals/guitar), Thomas Fekete (guitar/backing vocals), Kevin Williams (bass guitar/backing vocals), and Tyler Schwarz (drums) banded together to begin the life they had envisioned for themselves.

In 2009, the rock group was formed with clear objectives that included writing, releasing music and touring within a short amount of time. The band managed to accumulate attention from fans as well as media over the course of a few years with the release of their album and EP, *Astro Coast* and *Tarot Classics*, respectively. Festivals and tours splattered across their itineraries as their popularity grew. Surfer Blood was later added to Warner Bros. Records, giving the group a chance to check off yet another list of accomplishments.

Jumping into steadily growing careers leaves little room for preparation, but Surfer Blood seemed to handle the pressure with grace and expanded itself alongside its opportunities. The group spent 2011 on the road playing more than 300 shows, sporadically creating the material that would eventually be used for the new album. Over the course of this time, Surfer Blood got tighter as a band and learned to work with one another's stage presence. They took advantage of sound checks and free time to prepare for the future by writing.

"We would record a song every couple days and record an mp3 of it and that was it; we'd move on to something else," admits Pitts. "Then we ended up with 25 songs walking into the studio and I think that's what separates this [album] from anything else we've done. It was nice to have a lot of material to work from."

When it came time to record their most recent album, *Pythons*, the band took advantage of the resources they had gained along the way and went into the studio rather than recording at home as before. The group stretched themselves out of their comfort zone musically while keeping that Surfer Blood sound.

"We didn't want to be the band that does the same thing over and over again," Pitts claims. "We wanted to make a bigger record and get the opportunity to do that, and sign with a major label and work with a producer."

The trademark sound of Surfer Blood is very much present in *Pythons* with their summertime vibes and feel-good harmony. Pitts takes note of their recognizable sound but claims that it isn't intentional.

"It just sort of seems to be what we do well, what we're good at, and what people latch onto," Pitts identifies. "It's definitely not something we do consciously."

Pitts makes it clear that searching the Internet for reviews of their latest album is not on his to-do list. He also warns against the dangers of doing so at any point in a musician's career, admitting that it can truly affect the entire process in a negative way.

"Staying off Twitter is probably the healthiest thing you can do," he assures. "The worst thing you can do when you're performing every night or when you're writing

WORDS BY RACHEL FAYLENE

constantly is second guess yourself."

"You have to have some sort of a fluid aspect to it and sometimes you get self conscious, so anything you can do to get yourself out of that headspace is important."

Pitts prefers to communicate with fans in a more personable way as much as possible. He expresses the importance of interaction between the band and their show-goers and wants to be accessible. While fans might not be chatting with the group through social media, they do have the chance to get to know the group after a performance.

"I'm not really good with the Internet much myself with my personal life," he admits openly. "That's not really something I've taken the reigns with."

After his run-in with the law in 2012, the group's frontman has every right to be weary of the Internet. Pitts' arrest for domestic battery weighed heavily on the band and their public image. Although the charges were later dropped, it left plenty of room for the judgment and criticism that fell hard on the band. The group and Pitts specifically received both online and real world hate after the news was made public. While this might have caused their relationships with a number of peers and fans to dissolve, there is still a steady following and dedicated group of friends that support the band and its members in

their careers and their personal lives.

"I think anyone who is true to us would vouch for the fact that we're pretty nice guys most of the time," Pitts claims. "We have our bad days but we've been doing this for 3 or 4 years now and we've met a lot of people along the way. I think a lot of people who have written us off or said things that are less than nice – I might say the same thing too if I didn't know us."

The group is more than ready to move forward with their fans as well as their careers. Even with their early experience regarding the negative side of fame, the group marches onward with their heads held high. Learning that maybe not all press is good press hasn't derailed the band from wanting to be in the spotlight. They are pushing forward with their plans to be the band that they envisioned. Pitts makes it clear that his sights are set on living his life in the public eye if it means chasing his dreams.

"If we didn't like a little bit of attention we probably wouldn't be playing in a touring rock band," Pitts exclaims.

A new chapter is being written for Surfer Blood as it continues to move forward and grow. The group's goals for success are just as evident as they were in 2009 when Pitts says confidently, "We definitely want to take that next step." ■

*PRETTY  
LIGHTS*

+

THE GREAT  
EDM  
DEBATE

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BY AMANDA MORAD



**PRETTY LIGHTS' DEREK VINCENT SMITH ON AUTHENTICITY, RETROFITTING MUSIC TECHNOLOGY AND PUSHING THE LIMITS OF EDM.**

→ **A** true producer-performer, Derek Vincent Smith has his hand in just about every aspect of the projects of his EDM act, Pretty Lights. From writing copy for press releases to designing the album artwork and editing the documentary footage taken throughout the making of the new LP, *A Color Map of the Sun*, Smith's insistence on total involvement isn't necessarily about control (though he admits that's part of it), but about vision. "I just see how I want things," he says.

For this latest offering released July 2, Smith saw that he wanted to stretch the limits of Electronic Dance Music and help redefine the misconceptions of what he and many fellow EDM artists who insist on making original music actually do. In order to do that, Smith set out on perhaps the most challenging musical endeavor in the genre to date.



“The whole concept of the project was to go in and work with musicians and emulate the recording processes from different time periods and then compose music in those different styles,” Smith explains. And his commitment to period recording methods was staunch.

“I built a wall-sized modular analog synthesizer, like a telephone operating board,” Smith says. “You build a patch and it takes you hours to build the sound. Then you have to unplug everything after you’re done with it. You can’t save it, and then you move on to the next one. I wanted to basically create a 2013 album with gear that existed 40 years ago. That was my goal.”

*Color Map* certainly achieves that. But for the buttery analog sound composition and the retro fonts on the album art, you’d never know it wasn’t built with the “latest and greatest” in music technology.

But. . . why retrofit such a contemporary art form?

“It wasn’t about stepping away from using synthesizers, it was about stepping away from the current state of technology,” Smith clarifies. “People say about my work, ‘oh, you use real instruments.’ Well, I don’t look at computer synthesizers as unreal instruments. But the boundary and parameter I set for this project was that I was using all authentic and from-the-time-period instruments. I was trying to get as bizarre and old-school with the sonic quality as I could.”

Calling *Color Map* EDM is somewhat a misnomer. While tracks like the first single, “Around the Block (feat. Talib Kweli)” get close, Smith admits that the “dance” part of EDM doesn’t really come across in his music.

“My music is hip-hop at the core and soul, though I suppose it has the power to make people dance,” Smith explains.

Tracks like “Yellow Bird” swing more toward ambient electronic while the opener “Color of My Soul” hints a little more at dubstep. But maybe labels aren’t the best way to classify *Color Map* at all. It’s music you want to drive to, think to, write to, jive to, play at a party or drum to at your desk.

EDM has a reputation for relying on modern technology to make music and has taken a lot of heat as a genre because of it. But Smith says the term “EDM” has simply become a catch-all label for anything electronic.

“The way that it’s used right now means music that is coming out of a computer or out of a turntable,” Smith explains. “But that’s just too broad. EDM is the easy label to put on a new culture.”

“It’s an emergence of a culture and of this new kind of event where one individual can stand on stage and perform other people’s music, their own music or a combination of both. And they can either hit play or they can completely deconstruct the song and then perform them on the fly and do all this complicated and sophisticated stuff on stage.”

“But either way, the crowd really doesn’t know what’s going on or what’s going into it. At an EDM festival, if you have some superstar DJ on stage, 90% of the crowd doesn’t know if the song he’s playing was written by him or written by someone else, and 100% of the crowd doesn’t know if he’s actually doing anything. So EDM is the label that’s been created to encompass that whole lack of knowledge of what the hell is going on with these artists and these shows.”

Smith, unsatisfied by all this, wants to see electronic artists get back to the basics of performance.

“I want to watch an artist who is playing his or her own music and also actu-

ally performing it, actually engaging with it onstage,” Smith says. “That’s where soul comes in. Even with computers and samplers and sets onstage, you can engage in your music and you can express soul by the way that you’re feeling it and the way that you’re manipulating it, in the way that it enters your body as a performer and artist.”

“That’s the ultimate,” Smith claims. “That’s the artist that I want to watch and that’s what I want to do.”

With that kind of attitude, it’s easy to see why Smith is nothing if not a pioneer in electronic music. He’s rejected the notion of computers running his live shows while he stands up on stage like a reverse Wizard of Oz—no curtain, same illusion of power. Instead, he and his lighting designer have developed their own system that keeps the visual fireworks in perfect sync with Smith as he directs the show, remixing his own songs with improvisation just as a live band would do...and just as he’ll do in October when he sets off on tour in support of *Color Map* with a full band.

“I just don’t want to be limited, and it’s been limited and it’s getting more limited as far as what a DJ/producer can do on stage,” Smith asserts. “There’s all this technology out there that allows for freedom, but no one really uses it for what it’s worth because you can’t try something completely new and then have your computer freeze in front of 30,000 people.”

That apprehension seems to barely be a consideration for Smith. He’s not afraid to push the limits of what he, or any electronic artist, can do. *Color Map* proved that 100 times over.

“This was just the ultimate dream for a sample artist to be able to compose and create my own vinyl sample,” Smith says. “I really just wanted to challenge myself. I’ve never worked with a 10-person band in the same room. Everything written on the fly and recorded on the fly. At first I had to act like I knew what I was doing, and by the end I had acquired a new set of skills.”

This isn’t the first time Smith has challenged himself to do something new, different and seemingly impossible. In a remarkable sprint of recording and producing in 2010, *Pretty Lights* released three EPs in one year.

“With every project I’ve done over the last three or four years, I’ve tried to come up with some conceptual approach to it that could be a challenge.”

As Smith continues his conquests in electronic music, there’s just no way to tell the butterfly effect his original production and insistence on creative freedom could have on the future of EDM...or whatever you want to call it. ■

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## SPOTLIGHT

# MARSHALL YOUNG BAND

**F**or Marshall Young, music started out as something his dad did. Growing up with a musician in the house, Young was always around music and one day decided to pick up the guitar.

Through the years, Young's sound has grown and developed. When he was 12, the bands New Found Glory and Blink 182 were on repeat, then when he was 14 his dad played him a Delbert Clinton song and that is when his love for the blues and rock music sparked.

Last month, The Marshall

Young Band released their new album *November*, which sounds a little like what would happen if The Goo Goo Dolls had originated in New Orleans. The band consists of Young on vocals and guitar, Caleb Anderson on lead guitar, Chuck Gasser on drums, and Clark Nowlin on bass. Their album is something that Young describes as "a huge learning experience."

"That was my first extended time slot in a professional recording studio," explains Young. "I've been in the studio before, but never with this

much wiggle room to be as creative and being able to experiment like we were able to do."

Young says his dad is his biggest inspiration and the only reason he plays guitar is because of his father's influence and the abundance of guitars around the house growing up.

Musically, Young draws inspiration from John Mayer and Stevie Ray Vaughn, noting Mayer's *Where the Light Is* as a catalyst for chasing his dreams.

"I just want to continue playing, regardless of where, or for what," says Young. **-V**



BY JONATHAN ROBLES // PHOTO BY DUSTIN

## SPOTLIGHT

# THE LAST ROYALS

**T**heir album, *Twistification*, kicked off what has become quite the year in music so far. Having spent the past couple of years building momentum, The Last Royals (consisting of singer-songwriter-producer-guitarist Eric James and drummer Mason Ingram) finally released their debut record in January. And while the band's material injects fresh energy into any playlist, with shamelessly danceable beats and shiny indie-pop sounds, some of their songs have actually been floating around for a while.

SiriusXM's Alt Nation satellite radio channel added the band's song "Crystal Vases" to its rotation back in 2011, much to the surprise of the

band. Listeners loved it. And in the age of the Internet, this little-known Brooklyn-based outfit saw firsthand the perks of radio.

"I didn't realize how powerful XM radio is," admits James, speaking between tour stops. "The program director contacted me on my personal Facebook page. I was like, 'Who is this guy?'" and my manager was like, 'Call him!' He just started playing it and other DJs picked it up, too ... I felt like I was in the '50s for a minute, where DJs are choosing what they like. What a concept! I guess that's how it used to be. I felt like I had peered into this little window of time—how [bands] could go from nobodies to suddenly someone taking a chance on them.

That's beautiful! From that point on we sort of determined that we wanted to be a radio band."

Acknowledging perhaps the complexity of the music industry these days, the band has done its best to make smart, strategic decisions when it comes to promo methods and even tour options. Having been one of thousands of acts to perform this year at SXSW—in addition to festivals like Summerfest and Firefly, James believes those appearances are merely a small part of the equation.

"It's more about having them be on your rap sheet," he explains. "Like, 'Yeah, we played SXSW.' A lot of people are looking at where you're playing. But I think a

lot of bands walk away from [festivals] spending several thousand dollars, then going, 'Crap, what did we gain?' For us, it's like, you say you want to be in a band and work hard? Then you work hard. Our agent actually signed us because of the Rachael Ray show at SXSW. So, you never know who's going to be there. You play like it's your last show."

The Last Royals, however, aren't anywhere near their last show. "We're starting to write again," reveals James. "We're in that dangerous cycle where songs are now kind of old to us, but you can't treat them that way. It's actually a good thing, though, because it means we're playing—touring. We hope to keep touring this fall." -V



## SPOTLIGHT

# CAZZETTE

BY ELI PROVENZANO // PHOTO BY JASON MONGUE

**W**hen it comes to mainstream music, EDM (electronic dance music) has not exactly been at the front of the pack. But if Spotify and Cazzette have anything to say about it, that will soon change.

Cazzette, a Swedish DJ duo consisting of Sebastian Furrer and Alexander Bjorklund, has found its way into the hearts of music lovers worldwide thanks to a little experimentation, a music video featuring an alien invasion, and a pioneering attitude.

Stepping into the unknown, Cazzette teamed up with Spotify in order to take its music to new heights. After their success with boosting the career of Kendrick Lamar, Spotify realized the influence their site had and wanted to use that to launch the career of new bands all over the world. Having always been a fan of streaming music, Furrer was proud to partner with the streaming titan, saying, “It was really cool. It was something different, of course. Like, we were the first ones to ever put out an album exclusively on a streaming service.”

The only hitch seemed to be when fans voiced their disappointment at not being able to download Cazzette’s music on iTunes.

“Of course it’s pretty sad to hear that

people are disappointed,” says Furrer, “But I think we did have to do what we did in a way that we just put it out there to actually make people be a part of Spotify, and just experience it. That’s what we wanted to do, get people to love what we love, the streaming service. We wanted people to be a part of that and see that new world of music. I mean, everything you do when it comes to music and putting it out on different platforms is all a risk, and people are always going to be disappointed in some way, but you can’t make everyone happy. We did our best and now [we put] it on iTunes, so hopefully people think the wait was worth it.”

Getting EDM into the mainstream spotlight has not been an easy task, but Cazzette is not alone. With Daft Punk’s recent return with *Random Access Memories*, more people are looking at the music format in a whole new way.

“Obviously, people get more excited and everyone has been waiting for new tracks from them for forever,” says Furrer about Daft Punk. “What they did, they just went back to the ‘70s and re-did a little bit of that, and that’s really cool. I think it was necessary for electronic music because it’s been too much the same for a while. It’s always like that, you know. When there’s

a certain kind of music that’s big for the moment, someone has to step up the game and make everyone think, ‘Oh, wow! They stepped up and now I have to step up mine.’ It makes everyone want to evolve and improve their sound and their music and their stage productions. That’s how people get better all the time. Daft Punk is a really big hit for everyone now and to follow those steps is hard, but it’s exciting in the same way.”

Taking EDM to a new level may be in the cards for Cazzette, but for right now this dynamic duo is more concerned with their own work and how to get their music out there. “It’s just disturbing to think about the scene, how everything sounds the same,” Furrer admits, “I personally would rather not think about it. I just think, ‘I do what I do. Other people do what they do. If they do it, good. If there are other people that like it, that’s cool. But I just want to do my stuff.’”

With Cazzette’s big single, “Beam Me Up,” causing dance fever everywhere, the DJs are looking forward to tour dates, an album release and getting new music on the scene.

“We’re working on so many tracks right now,” he reveals. “It’s a hectic time for sure.” -V



## SPOTLIGHT

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# LAST NOTE

**A**fter moving to Rochester, N.Y., seven years ago, Nick LeDuc decided to get some guys together and start what would later become Last Note. While in high school, he joined the school band and was quickly approached by some older classmates about playing in their band.

“It was then that I started to expand my mind musically and really take in a lot of different influences,” says LeDuc.

LeDuc was able to decide early on the type of artist he wanted to be and where he wanted to take his music. Upon his relocation to Rochester,

LeDuc began the search for bandmates and found them when he perused some open mics in the city.

The band’s new album, *Highways*, brings a refreshing sound and catchy melodies. LeDuc’s voice is unique and adds a warmth to the album’s songs.

“It’s a journey through the trials and tribulations of life we are all given daily with hope at the end of that road,” he says. “It’s something I truly believe everyone can enjoy time and time again.”

With touring being so important for up-and-coming musicians, LeDuc sees live shows

as a way to improvise and manipulate a song differently than in the recording. He also likes to see the way the crowd responds.

“I love to see and feel the energy off of everyone at the show, enjoying the music the way it’s meant to be taken in,” he explains. “I also love sending a positive message to new faces, enjoying seeing strangers meeting under circumstances that may not be there had the music not been.”

LeDuc is excited for what the future holds for the band. “[I want] to continue to reach new faces, [and] to grow to bigger venues, even festivals.” -V



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