

Bastille: Abbey Road, via a broom cupboard

Bastille frontman Dan Smith talks with [Francesca Donovan](#) about their first 12-track, his love of David Lynch, and his fear of performing

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There's a preconceived persona "musos" like to attach to the frontmen of rock bands. We are almost innately programmed to conjure up images of Mick Jagger's coquettish confidence, Brandon Flowers' flamboyant style, Axl Rose's unadulterated arrogance. The romanticised idea that the confident guy with buckets of sex appeal struts around on stage, while the creative genius shies away from the limelight is more than just a notion - it is standard procedure.

Dan Smith, frontman and the brain behind Bastille - happily - breaks the mould. He makes no attempt to hide his unease when performing to the mass crowds Bastille persistently draw to their shows, saying that he's "not a particularly confident person... If you found getting up on stage in front of 1000 people normal, and you weren't freaked out by it, there's definitely something wrong with you".

But that's not to say he has a nervous disposition: playing music on stage comes easily to Dan - it is the intermission between songs when he is "expected to say something interesting, funny or worthwhile" when the pressure is really on. In the half hour that he animatedly chats for, though, I get the overwhelming impression that Dan is a modest, introspective character who doesn't take praise easily or nonchalantly. He is a self-confessed pessimist, inferring the weakness in the interview and proclaiming it in his lyrics: "How am I going to be an optimist about this?" Perhaps the flood of critical acclaim Dan's quartet has received is ghosted by recollections of "recording in a broom cupboard with a mate" - a far cry from The Beatles Room at Abbey Road Studios, where Bastille finished the production of *Bad Blood*, the new album, which will be released on the 4th of March; "from one extreme to the other" as Dan puts it. "When we started out we had to work very hard and I don't feel like anything's been handed to us on a plate" says Smith, upholding the fact that, despite the influx of indie bands into the popular music scene, it is not always plain sailing for those trying to write, record, produce and play their music while holding

down jobs, studying for degrees and resorting to “borrowing our friends’ mums cars” to tour.

Against the odds, perhaps, Bastille were doubtless one of the huge successes of 2012. With support and backing from influential names at Radio 1 like Sara Cox and Nick Grimshaw, they have sold out three UK tours, played some of the biggest festivals worldwide, racked up over 6 million hits on YouTube and collected a dedicated fan base. (And when ‘Flaws/Icarus’ was included in the soundtrack of an episode of Made in Chelsea, Bastille knew they had well and truly made it...) Dan’s excitement at this astronomical rise to prominence is palpable: “We are so lucky. It’s so much fun!”

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“Our audiences are generally just fucking awesome and wanna jump around a lot...”
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Bastille’s success is justly based on the music the quartet, driven by Dan himself, have created. The band has effortlessly settled into a signature style of upbeat, anthemic melodies, exquisitely juxtaposed with lyrical sentiment. None of the four members are versed in guitar playing, a fact that is not at all to their disadvantage. Where other indie rock bands like Friendly Fires and Vampire Weekend rely heavily on the traditional guitar based indie paradigm, Bastille has developed a sound encompassing distortion, layered vocals, strings and complex beats to more than make up for the so-called loss, and in doing so has redefined the parameters of the genre. Dan’s vocal has an interesting and distinguishable tone – extricating the band from the tidal wave of middle-of-the-road electro-pop sounds that are so commonly heard today and setting the bar high for lyrical talent to come.

Each of the twelve songs on Bad Blood captures the spirit of youth culture. A sense of nostalgia in tracks like ‘Weight of Living Part II’ and ‘These Streets’ crescendos into the questioning chorus lines of ‘Things We Lost in the Fire’, ‘Pompeii’ and ‘Oblivion’: “Are you going to age with grace?”

These are songs that reflect the modern disillusion and anxieties held by a myriad of young people today, expressing fear of responsibility, growing up and, as in ‘Get Home’, getting yourself safely back to bed after a particularly heavy night; it’s an honest album. An album that is mature for a young writer who seems to bear all in just under an hour of musical entrapment. While writing, Dan “never set about to write personal songs, I kind of see most of them as stories or conversations.” In doing so, he has constructed songs that are really about something, as opposed to the lyrical contemplations of abstract notions that are musically in vogue. Smith simply “wanted to gesture towards a mood or feeling” and is grateful that this approach leaves his work open to interpretation, upon which he mused “I guess that’s the point, isn’t it?” The flawless electronic melodies and heady mix of bass, drum and ethereal tones are musically playful – attracting an energetic crowd at live shows who “are generally fucking awesome and just wanna jump around and stuff”.

A multi-faceted talent, Dan is also somewhat of a visual artist, the creative influence behind much of the video accompaniments released in conjunction with his songs. A keen David Lynch fan, he even dedicated one of the tracks, ‘Laura Palmer’, to the dead girl from cult 90s show, Twin Peaks. When asked about the importance of visuals in the music business he effusively replied that “nowadays, the opportunity presents itself to provide something visual alongside your music – why wouldn’t you try and use that to create an engaging aesthetic that can add another enigmatic dimension to the songs?”

On the morning we spoke, Dan and his bandmates were just about to embark on their UK tour in support of Two Door Cinema Club, followed by a sixteen date headlining tour. Go and see them while the venues are intimate. You’d be a fool not to, as I suspect the next time Bastille get round to playing a live tour, they’ll be appearing in front of the bright lights of the UK’s biggest stages.



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