

## In The Spotlight: Vance Joy

[Katrina Northern](#) meets the Australian folk singer-songwriter

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Interview and Review: The Castle Hotel, Manchester, 12th October 2013

'I got in on a flight about three hours ago. I watched the first Alien movie...' The one where the alien bursts out of someone's stomach? 'Yeah...the lady next to me was eating her dinner', James Keogh (aka Vance Joy) laughs and shakes his head. He has just completed his sound-check for the first of four shows in the UK and looks pretty good for someone who's just walked off a plane from LA. His signature dark, tousled curls sit atop the tall frame of someone who played a lot of Australian football, and those glinting dark eyes betray no sign of sleep-deprivation.

It's been an exciting year for the twenty-five year old singer-songwriter from Melbourne. His debut EP *God Loves You When You're Dancing* came out earlier this year after he caught the eye of Atlantic Records. Now he has ventured to the UK to test the musical waters and Nouse are lucky enough to have secured an interview with him.

Apart from a 'couple of stop-overs in flights', this is Vance's first time in the UK. He arrives on the back of a recently released and acclaimed EP. "I've done a bit of touring in Australia and a little bit in America so it kind of made sense to come over here and just maybe dip my foot in the water and see if there was anyone around here who was interested in my music". The sold-out shows (he had to add another date in London) are testament to the reach of his music and the number of people it has affected.

**Can you tell us a bit about the EP? What made you choose the name?** Those 5 songs... probably the oldest song is *From Afar*. I had that song recorded in 2010 and so that reaches back a fair way. Most of the other songs started in 2012... I think the start of *Riptide* I had in 2008, I had different ideas floating around and I stuck it all together. The first song I recorded was *Riptide* and that was without a producer, it was just with me and my drummer - we went into a studio in Melbourne, paid 700 bucks and got the day in the studio with a sound engineer and we just recorded that song... that's the same version that is on the EP. And the naming I just had a notebook and I was writing stuff and had that title *God Loves You*

When You're Dancing... I was kind of a bit nervous about using it.

**Are there religious connotations? Or did you just like the phrase and the sound of it?** No - it was the phrase and the sound of it... you're never going to make everyone happy and you've kind of got to stick by it.

**From Afar is a very emotional song, as is the music video - where did that come from?** That was a long time in the making. I came back from a trip and I had a couple of songs in my bag but I had that line 'I love you from afar' and I had that there for a while and it took a while to piece together but it felt very natural. I wasn't even thinking about writing songs in terms of really forcing anything - it just came naturally. It fell together over a long period of time- the start of that might have been March of 2010 and the first time I ever performed it and recorded it would have been the end of that year. It lived for that whole time - that was kind of the song I'd play at gigs and open mic nights when I was showing my songs. Then I wrote an outro to that. I think the writing process can take ages - but the best songs usually take a long while - you let them simmer and they become richer because of that experience.

**Do you ever find you get emotional while you're performing it or are you just 'in the zone'?** I think I've performed it a lot of times now so it's probably less emotional but you know, there's always some emotion invested in it because you're standing in front of people and you've got to be in the song to deliver it in the right way. If you really believe in the song you'll always tap into some kind of emotional feeling.

**Vance Joy isn't your real name, what made you choose that as your stage name?** I got it out of a book I was reading called Bliss by Peter Carey- he's an interesting character the guy - he's a storyteller. I guess I didn't feel comfortable using my name and that was an interesting one. I also thought if I want to have a band, just have a sound, it could be more easy to describe a whole idea and a whole sound under that name umbrella as opposed to just me

**You've just won the AIR awards for breakthrough artist and EP of the year - what does that feel like?** Yeah that was unreal! That was awesome. I went to school with a guy called Nick Murphy he performs under the name Chet Faker and he did a similar thing he got a couple of AIR awards last year so it's kind of funny - he really inspired me to pursue music. I was surprised to receive them - I wasn't there to pick them up - I had to do a video message. That was really cool, I mean those kind of things, I probably wouldn't have minded - you don't care if you don't get anything but when you do it's like 'oh awesome'!

**Have you been doing music for quite a long time? What were you doing beforehand? And what led you into doing music as a career?** I think it was just I always enjoyed song-writing, and the more you do it the better you get at it. I was just in a kind of crappy band after high school and then in 2009 I wrote a song that was kind of better than anything up to that point so I was like 'Woah, maybe I can do this'. And I knew that it took a lot of work to get to at least one decent song but I was kind of hooked after that and wanted to keep trying out more and more. So it was kind of like I was doing uni and I was also ticking away writing songs and then at the end of uni I thought maybe I should spend six months just doing music and see what happens. That was about a year ago, luckily I recorded some songs and got a few breaks - so it was never like 'I'm going to be a musician'.

**That natural progression, without too much pressure, can be better. Artists can sometimes get tailored and lose control of their sound.** Yeah I don't want to do any of that tailoring. Yeah, got to stay strong!

**Who are the musicians who have influenced you?** I think from Australia - I grew up listening to a lot of Crowded House - that's such good music, such good song-writing. It's almost hard to understand how Neil Finn writes these songs. Also, Paul Kelly, the Australian singer/songwriter. But all the same music you guys probably listen to - like I listen to that new Arcade Fire song a lot.

**I like to follow what's happening on Balcony TV - I find a lot of good musicians on there. How**

**important do you think those kind of internet platforms are for artists - does it help a lot?**

Yeah I think it can help. They're fun to do - you get on a balcony, you sing - I did one in LA recently which was the funniest experience- I probably shouldn't say anything - it was just fun - standing on a balcony singing an acoustic version of your song with the band. We had a glass of wine- it was just like in some random house in LA. I think it's good - especially if it's a really good performance and they capture a great moment then people can watch it and be like 'oh' - they see the song in a different form - just like 'this is so communicated directly to me'. I think most of the time it's just one take and if it's good it's good.

**You have a 5 year record deal, how does that work?** Yeah I've got a record deal with Atlantic so those kind of deals work in a way that you need to be doing well and selling records to continue the deal - hopefully. I get at least one shot for a full length and then we'll see what happens after that.

**Have you already worked on some new songs?** Yeah I'm going into a studio in Seattle to record - I've got a bag full of songs, I can try and complete a full length.

**Is your music a big emotional outlet for you? How do you use the music?** I think it's personal in the sense that if you hear a line in a movie, or a book or someone says a line and that triggers something - I feel like that's a good line and you take that and put it in a song you've got some emotional reason for putting it in. but it's not like me venting - I think I'm more passionate about good lines and good song-writing. Kike when you read a good book and it hits you - you've got to try and find those moments.

Vance is just as casually charming when he takes to the stage alone later that night. The intimate venue suits the sweet melancholic folk sound and after a few verses the crowd is riveted. He starts with 'Emmylou' (because every folk or country artist should have a song called 'Emmylou'). Its gentle rhythm pervades until it slips into a stirring repetition of 'you are loved, you are loved, you are loved'. His voice is immediately arresting with its soft, quivering intensity which can rise so naturally into a falsetto. The twinkle in his eye as he plays stand-out track From Afar is testament to the power of the song and his own talent as a storyteller. The bittersweet tale of doomed love is beautifully expressed in the inflections of his tone and range. The lyrical constructions are rich and poetic ('I've been living on the crumbs of your love / and I'm starving now... I always knew that I would love you from afar') and the outro is quietly anguished and haunting.

He also showcases a few new tracks 'Wasted Time', 'All I Ever Wanted' and 'Red Eye', which is about the flight from one side of Australia to the other. Vance chooses the perfect cover for the evening - a simple, heartfelt rendition of Bruce Springsteen's 'Dancing in the Dark'. He cannot hide a small smile as the audience join in for the chorus and the room is drawn together.

'Snaggletooth' is sweetly endearing, being fairly self-explanatory as a tribute to a person's endearing quirks. 'Play with Fire' and 'Riptide' signal the switch to the ukulele, and it is clearly the latter which a lot of the crowd have been waiting for. 'Riptide' is a stunningly atmospheric (he has described it as 'flavoursome'), up-tempo number which sailed onto radios with ease in Australia and became a platinum-selling hit, generating a huge buzz. It is unlike anything else on the EP and is extremely catchy. It brings the gig to a close on an emphatic note, even prompting outbreaks of embarrassing dancing. Despite calls for an encore, Vance's repertoire is understandably small at the moment but make no mistake, the future is bright.



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## 2 comments

Andy

11 Dec '13 at 9:56 am

Nice interview. Seems like a thoughtful guy. Good to see his appreciation of Neil Finn.

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Sansy

13 Dec '13 at 11:52 pm

Interesting interview-

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