

LET'S GOMEZ

Britain's best rock band remains relatively unknown in the States despite two stellar albums. *by Dan Marek*



Huddled around a pinball machine in a small, shadowy American bar, England's Gomez are discussing how Garth Brooks doesn't know anything about rock'n'roll, while Johnny Cash and Willie Nelson helped invent it. This discussion concerning heritage music bounces back and forth throughout the day and seems to be a regular conversation piece. The band's influences range from blues expansionists to folk guitarists, psychedelic rockers to R&B greats, and have created a sound that won them the Mercury Music prize in England in 1998 for their debut album, *Bring It On*, and a *Mojo* cover story as well.

Now a household name in their homeland, Gomez hope to reach the vast American listening audience with their second album, *Liquid Skin* (Virgin). "It's very different from the first one, but comes from that same philosophy—another exploration, another adventure," says vocalist, keyboardist and guitarist Tom Gray. "As long as they haven't gotten the wrong idea from the first record, they will be happy. Hopefully, the first album allows people to realize that we were trying to make a progressive record, trying to contemporize lots of old ideas and at the same time mixing in some very modern things."

"Hangover," the opening track on *Liquid Skin*, mixes psychedelic overtones with a 10-piece orchestra recorded in the legendary Abbey Road Studios. "It was kind of designed in that hangover state where you just want somebody to say 'it's all right.' You know the motherly helping thing," explains guitarist and vocalist Ian Ball. "It's a very strange composition because the sound texture keeps switching from a four-track to a big studio and then Chinese kind of rain-dancing. This is all in three minutes. That's probably one of the main themes of the new stuff—how many different ways you can play a song in three minutes. So there are a lot of songs that are like four and a half minutes long, but actually go through an incredible amount of morphing."

Gomez also spent three weeks in a 16th-century mansion in East Sussex writing and recording the new material. "It was just a really mellow vibe, because we were in the middle of nowhere, loaded up with beer and marijuana," Ball says. "We'd get up at five o'clock in the afternoon and do whatever until four in the morning. I don't remember being sober in that house. You would wake up and feel so bad that you had to have some alcohol to get rid of it. It was more of a party than a recording session. I mean, the recording session happened incidentally to the party that was going on for three weeks. So that was where we started developing our studio experience, but I think Abbey Road was where the studio time really hit in."

The single, "Bring It On," released in the UK, includes the B-side "Dire Tribe," whose chorus lists every drug that makes them "feel better." There's also the sound of a quick puff on the intro to "Blue Moon Rising." "Our music, or any music for that matter, is accentuated by smoking pot," Gray says. "In the studio, on the stage or just listening to it. You hear so much more."

Gomez find the time to visit the "Free City" east of London as often as possible. "Amsterdam is undoubtedly a great place to be," says Ball. "The best thing about it is being able to walk around stoned and nobody gives a shit. Because there isn't anywhere else where you can be stoned beyond belief and still be able to walk around."

As expected, they prefer English-style spliffs, with tobacco. "If you smoke it pure, you're really fuckin' out of it," vocalist Ben Outtewell offers.

"It really depends on the situation," says bassist Paul Blackburn. "If you're hanging around at home, you would mix it with tobacco. But if you want to get really stoned, then you do it American style. If you smoke a bong you might as well give up. You have to call everybody and cancel everything, 'cause you're fucked. Then just turn on the radio and sit back." ■