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THE BLACK AND WHITE YEARS

BAVU BLAKES - LOXSLY
DREW SMITH - BRUCE ROBISON
ACL PREVIEW - DJ MANNY - EL TULE

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Just a few months ago after our re-launch of our website **AustinME.com** our web traffic has skyrocketed. **AustinME.com** now receives nearly 30,000 unique visitors and over 80,000 page views monthly. This huge growth brings even more opportunity for bands, fans and our advertisers. For a limited time bands can still set up free profiles where they can stream and sell music and merchandise, blog plus much more. With a consistently robust web presence **AustinME.com** will give companies the opportunity to get in front of (and support) our audience of musicgoers, bands and industry executives. If you would like more information on securing a prominent presence in this market call us today.

Here is just a taste of what's inside this issue: It wouldn't be our ACL issue without giving you a handy guide to both local and [inter]national acts you must see at Zilker Park this year. The power to change: Learn how a chance encounter with Jerry Harrison of Talking Heads has changed the future of The Black and White Years. Bruce Robison sends a love letter to Austin in our exclusive interview. Catch up with Bavu Blakes to find out why '08 is so great for this hip-hop talent. We dive into the landscape of Drew Smith's collaborative work with notable Austin allies. Read how Loxslly is pushing the fringe of Austin's "inde" scene with momentum on their side.



Dennis Carter, Associate Publisher

STAFF + CONTRIBUTORS

Publisher
Publications & Communications, Inc.

Associate Publisher / Sales Director
Dennis Carter
dennis@austinme.com

Editor
Jason Repko
jason@austinme.com

Art Director / Webmaster
Logan Ricketts
logan@austinme.com

Contributing Writers
Lawrence Boone, Francesca Camillo, Travis Catsull, Chelsea Chapa, Dante Dominick, Ben Leffler, Erich Pelletier, Julia Raish, Chad J. Reich, Logan Ricketts, Hillary Skaff, David Todd, Chelsea Wallace

Photographers
Philip Menchaca
Jason Whitmire
Ed Verosky

Interns
Rosa Santoyo
Chelsea Wallace

Austin Music + Entertainment
13581 Pond Springs Rd.
Suite 450
Austin, Texas 78729
(512) 637-0371 t.
(512) 331-3900 f.
www.austinme.com

For advertising or general information, call (512) 637-0371 or email us at info@austinme.com

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FEATURE: THE BLACK AND WHITE YEARS)))

the black and white years

Tight Pants and Mustaches Will Change the World

WORDS: TRAVIS CATSULL

IMAGES: ED VEROSKY



THE MOON RISES ON AUSTIN'S EASTSIDE WHERE THE BLACK AND WHITE YEARS PACK UP THEIR BELONGINGS TO SPREAD OUT FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE THEY COLLECTIVELY MOVED TO AUSTIN THREE YEARS AGO. HOMESPUN PAINTINGS, INSTRUMENTS, AND OTHER CREATIVE ESSENTIALS LITTER THE HOUSE AS THE BAND SLOWLY ARRIVES TO THE LIVING ROOM. GUITARIST LANDON THOMPSON REMARKS, "LIVING TOGETHER HELPED OUT A GREAT DEAL IN REGARDS TO PRACTICING AND WHATEVER, BUT NOW WE WANT OUR OWN SPACES."

Collecting to discuss the story of The Black and White Years, it begins familiar enough, and maybe you've heard it before. An ambitious group of young artists moves to Austin (this time from Nashville) to pursue their music careers, but it quickly takes a turn. The turn you rarely hear about, the direction every band gassing up their dreams and driving towards the Live Music Capital of the World hopes will happen.

Rewind to South by Southwest 2007 where The Black and White Years are playing "genre-blurring, squiggly synth rock" to a handful of people at some off-the-path venue. It just so happens that one of those people is Jerry Harrison, former keyboardist of Talking Heads. Harrison quickly becomes their biggest fan and it's here that The Black and White Years story gets interesting. While they don't have a drummer, a manager, or anything other than a handful of home recordings, Harrison flies them to San Francisco to record their first full-length album. Singer and Texas native Scott Butler recalls:

"So we walk into Sausalito Sound with no idea of what to expect and the drum situation quickly became a problem. We'd been using a sequencer instead of an actual drummer and the drum loops were a big part of our sound. It sounds really electric and dynamic, but Harrison called in Steve Ferrone from Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers to lay down some drum tracks, and it just didn't feel right. I mean, he's an amazing drummer, but it took away a huge part of the sound we'd been working on. We didn't know what to do."

For weeks the band worked with Harrison to get the album to sound how they envisioned. Days were spent in the studio and each night they returned to their houseboat in the bay a little bit more tired and a lot more frustrated. The band discussed the problem and Butler wrote a few songs about the experience that also inspired the album's artwork. After five weeks The

Black and White Years finished recording 15 songs, and while they weren't completely confident of its outcome, it was back to Austin they trudged.

Fast forward two months and they're still mixing the album. Four months and still working out some kinks. Six months pass and the album still wasn't something everyone could agree on. Eventually they decided the live drumming had completely killed the tone and vibe they'd purposefully and naturally developed. The band took a deep breath and flew back to California to rework tracks and figure out how to save the biggest album of their lives.

Bassist John Aldridge recalls, "there seemed to be a clash of ideas between Jerry [Harrison], the engineer, and us. Maybe it was the age gap or something. I don't know. We really had to fight to keep our sound the way we wanted, we had to fight for our synth. We started to get a little scared that the album would come out sounding nothing like us. Finally we went back and re-synched the drum machines over the live drums so we'd have the live drum kicks, but the electric synth sound too. It worked; it sounded great.

Thompson concurs, "yeah, we're really happy with the album. All the hard work paid off and we're really excited about it."

Austin's Brando Records agreed to release their eponymous album amidst sizzling magazine reviews and blog postings. Butler admits, "we've been happy with the reviews the new album has received. We're our own worst critics so anytime someone says something good about it we're ecstatic, but still a bit skeptical. Recording the album was a very emotional experience for us so really, we're glad people are enjoying it."

It's been easy to make a comparison to Talking Heads or Of Montreal, but it's revealing that the influences The Black and White Years hold high are versatile and go even deeper. Butler credits the writing of Daniel Quinn,



author of *Ishmael* and *The Story of B*, as playing a huge factor in the writing process. "I've always been a prolific writer and the philosophy of Daniel Quinn provided a lot of early material. I've written over 200 songs and most of the songs you hear now were written under The Trees, the band we formed before this one. The Trees sounded like Paul Simon [or] the Beatles though, and it just didn't feel right. The writing in this album talks a lot about myself and the end of the world."

The album starts appropriately enough with "A Wetter Sea," whose lyrics dream, *Physically I am a some-sort waifish / Resolutely looked upon approachable / I scream into a dream in some dumb language and woke a silent room*. The driving beats and reggae-fused guitar provide a surreal landscape where wolves prowl Polaroid mountains and lone spacemen float along in pink suits with '70s mustaches. Citing the movie *Spinal Tap* as a continual reminder to not take themselves too seriously seems like a good move, as Butler's lyrics are anything but tongue-in-cheek. From the David Bowie meets Dick Dale song "Hysterical Sickness," Butler cries, *Morning, it all hurts again / Something cancerous is growing / I tell myself it's just my imagination / Illness is my interstate*. It's through this maze of padded labyrinths and dramatic self-loathing that one takes a stranglehold on the deep juxtapositions The Black and White Years provide. Pitch-dark lyrics contrast with sunny upbeat numbers and infectiously feel-good melodies throughout the album. The room is silent no more. There is a natural melody here and it is being measured by fans and critics alike.

The band has played and run through Austin's best venues with plenty of ready-to-dance fans, which helped land The Black and White Years a spot at Austin City Limits this year. While playing a noon slot on Saturday isn't the most envied position, Thompson is mindful, "hey, we're just happy to be playing this festival. Plus, we're really excited about getting to see Beck and hopefully MGMT. None of us have ever been to ACL. Things are happening for us and playing ACL is something we're all looking forward to."

The group realizes that their album is still being unboxed (with an official release date in September) and while the buzz has been ecstatic, it's too soon to say the rest is history on this story. But it's no secret their beginning has been an enigmatic, if not storybook, adventure. It is safe to say the overall goal for The Black and White years is to quit their day jobs in the food service industry. Yes, surprisingly enough they *all* work at some Austin eatery. Butler chimes in on the future of the band, "if we can't simply take over the world, we'll be happy to play music for a living."

Opening up for The Presidents of the United States of America at Stubb's and House of Blues on the Texas portion of PUSA's global tour certainly can't hurt. With a new management team focusing on the promotion of their record and plenty of shows being offered, the band has already begun to focus on their sophomore release. Aldridge admits, "we're inspired by the fans, we're all feeling very creative and energetic right now."

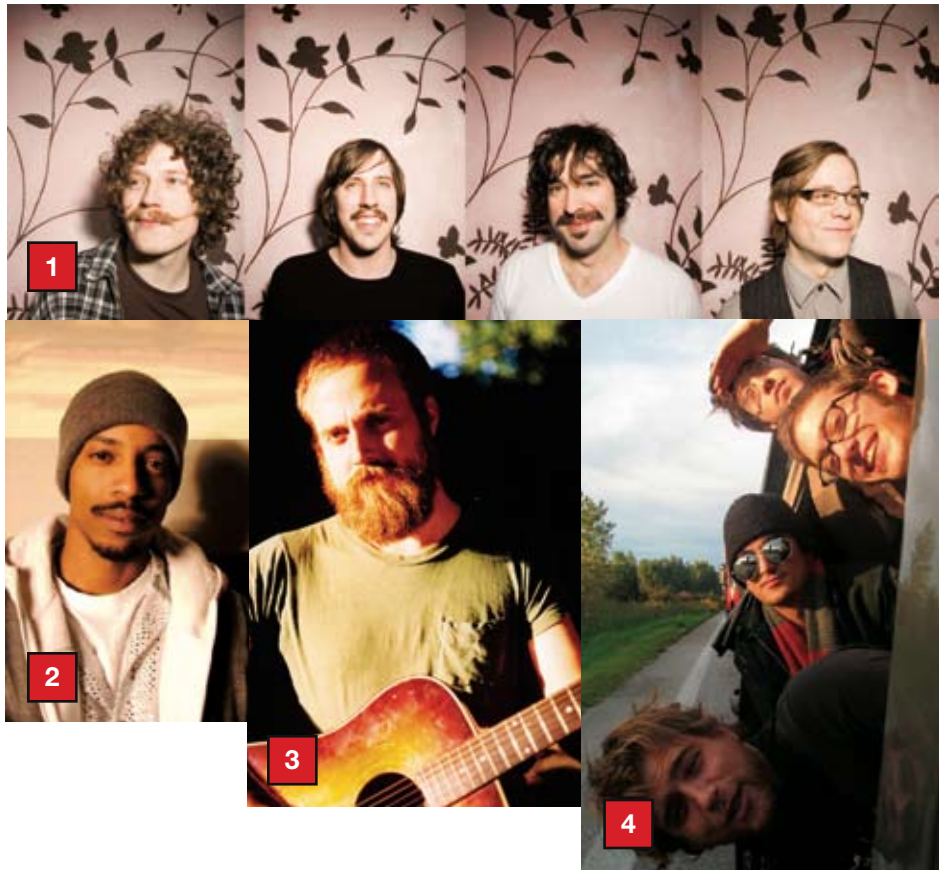
Inspired indeed. The Black and White Years are storming the scene with a power and gain that seems almost unfair in Austin's workman-like music scene. As the band grows emotionally and professionally in seeking their own space, they carve their own spot in our musical history. It is from their struggle that we appropriate their past into the future. The future is black and white and honestly...it has never looked more electric. **am+e**



austin city limits local acts

WORDS: ERICH PELLETIER

THE AUSTIN CITY LIMITS MUSIC FESTIVAL IS KIND OF LIKE A LENS—A LENS THROUGH WHICH VISITORS FROM 'ROUND THE WORLD CAN TAKE A CLOSE LOOK AT SOME OF THE BEST THAT AUSTIN HAS TO OFFER. THESE THREE HOT AND SWEATY DAYS IN SEPTEMBER BRING A LOT INTO FOCUS FOR US LOCALS TOO. THE RANGE AND VARIETY OF MUSIC BEING CREATED IN AND AROUND THIS LITTLE CITY IS ALMOST AS STAGGERING AS ITS QUALITY. CONCENTRATE ALL OF THAT INSPIRATION AND TALENT IN ONE PARK, ON ONE WEEKEND, AND YOU HAVE A RARE OPPORTUNITY TO REALLY SEE WHAT MAKES THIS PART OF THE COUNTRY SO SPECIAL. WHILE EVERYONE PLAYING THE FESTIVAL IS WORTH CHECKING OUT, HERE ARE OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE BEST LOCAL ACTS TO SEE.



Ryan Bingham

Friday, 6:40 pm

BMI Stage

With a hard-traveled, road-weary voice that belies his 27 years, Bingham delivers songs that channel endless Southwestern spaces into nuggets of romance and wisdom. His debut album, *Mescalito*, promises to carry him to the top of the country rebel pile. Far from Nashville, this is Texas Country: train-hopping, whiskey-loving, desert wasteland-chewing country. Bingham delivers a live show that's as honest as his roots. Cow...punk?

1. The Black and White Years

Saturday, noon

Austin Ventures Stage

Possessors of the finest gathering of mustaches seen in Austin since the 1970s, the Years are one of those bands who you can sense are about to break huge. Their genre-spanning 2008 debut showed their chops for making addictively danceable, precise, pretty syntho-guitar pop that arrives as though filtered through three decades of hazy Texas summers. Catch them on a mid-day stage while you can—next year you won't be able to get anywhere close.

2. Black Joe Lewis & the Honeybears

Saturday, 4:00 pm

Austin Ventures Stage

Raw, heavy soul blues. That aggressive punch-you-in-the-face and then grind-sweet-lovin' all over your semiconscious carcass (as an apology) kind of blues. (You'll be OK, baby, I still love you.) James Brown and Maceo Parker and Lightnin' Hopkins sweaty yelling from the pulpit to bring down the wrath of a back alley god kind of blues. If you can stand up to the heat and the purifying, terrifying trueness of it all, you'll go home wiser, stronger, and decidedly funkier.

3. Iron & Wine

Saturday, 7:30 pm

Dell Stage

Listening closely to an Iron & Wine song is like studying a caterpillar through a magnifying glass—the more you dig, the more interesting bits you'll find, and the bits are always compelling. Relatively new Austinite Sam Beam's (who recorded his last album here in Austin), lyrics may be obtuse at times, but they ring through a voice that blends seamlessly with air and sun. The guitar figures are only as simple and understated as they need to be. Anyone who thinks that true folksy songwriting has no room left for originality should prepare to be proven wrong.

4. Okkervil River

Sunday, 5:30 pm

AT+T Blue Room

Okkervil River brings an honest, unassuming rock sound that blends occasional elements of keys, horns, banjo, and mandolin (and etcetera and so forth) into something that moves fluidly and fluently between compelling party blasts and achingly pretty loneliness. This is a big rock band in more ways than one; with six members to fill out a large sound, they've also made a gigantic splash on the international indie rock scene. If you miss this set, your hip friends will never let you live it down.

White Denim

Sunday, 6:30 pm

Austin Ventures Stage

With songs that feel like they're always on the edge of spinning completely into crazyland, this somewhat bluesy, somewhat preacher-like, completely filthy garage rock trio will make you dance and *will* make you sweat. That out of control tent revival feel is an illusion. These guys know *exactly* what they're doing. Find out why they're well on the way to establishing a reputation as one of the best live shows to emerge from Austin in years.