

2011 Rising Stars: interviews with the next big things

Beatweek Magazine

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5.10.2011
issue #101

The Material

The Beatweek
interview



"I'm not going to write a bunch of songs about rainbows and butterflies," says Colleen D'Agostino as to why the lyrics on her band's latest record *What We Are* cover a range of relatable emotional difficulties even though she herself is in a good state of mind. The five piece rock outfit known as The Material hails from San Diego, but when Colleen promised last year that the record would "sound like Portland" it was because half of it was written there, with the other half crafted in Los Angeles. Although filled with the kind of pop hooks the band has become known for through the EPs it's released over the years, *What We Are* takes a heavier turn sonically and emotionally.

"I wanted to write it from other people's perspective," she explains. "The album was really influenced by the fact that my parents are in the middle of a divorce and they split up last year after thirty-one years of marriage. That's really fueled a lot of the angstiness in the lyrics. If I'm talking about leaving someone, it's not really about me. It's from a different perspective. I want songs to be relatable. Honestly, I love my situation and the fact that I'm able to go across the country with my band. Even though we're not making a lot of money at this point in our

careers yet, we're happy with what we get to do and happy with just being nomads."

That said, "I definitely went through a lot of stress and a lot of questioning about whether love really lasts now with every family. I think I portrayed that pretty well in my lyrics, and I've gotten a lot of people who have written me. Recently one girl wrote me and said that my songs had really helped her get through a hard time. Her mom had just passed away. That kind of stuff is so touching to me because even though the songs might sound depressing or angsty, I think that there's a hopeful undertone to each of them."

The frustration of the album's title track, however, comes from a different place and belongs squarely to the band members themselves who, despite having flirted with labels and deals, remain unsigned. "That song definitely shows the frustration that I have with the music industry right now," says



Colleen of the ups and downs of staying indie by choice. "Everybody is always trying to put their own direction that I don't feel is necessarily the right direction for us. People say you need to sound more like Paramore or you need to sound more like Flyleaf or you need to wear shorter skirts, all this crazy stuff. I can't see why we can't just be what we are, because our fans appreciate it."

Some of those fans have even begun ordering custom artwork painted by Colleen herself, even though that process happened mostly by accident. Despite having been an artist since her youth, painting had taken the backburner to music until an instance writer's block got the best of her. "I was on a deadline to finish some lyrics for one of the last songs for the album, so I just started painting. I got some canvas and some paint and went crazy with it. I posted a picture of it and all these fans started asking where they could buy my artwork."

That desire to put physical instrument to paper has her still writing most of her lyrics in a hardback notebook with a pen, one lyric book per year, even amidst the increasing presence of technology. "I've been writing more on the laptop," she says, "but it keeps you grounded to be able to write and go back and see that maybe you didn't write the best song when you first wrote it, but how it's developed."

The Material's lineup including Jon Moreaux and Roi Elam on guitar has been a stable one of late, but the band did need to bring on a new drummer last year after their founding

percussionist opted to retire from the road. They went with Kevin Pintado after he happened to be at one of their shows and later pitched himself. After bringing him into the studio and hearing his skills, he had the job an hour later. He proved to be the perfect fit for a constantly touring band because "he had no responsibilities. He didn't have a car. He didn't even have a cellphone. He had nothing, and he was just all about playing drums."

Although What We Are has been available for half a year, fans shouldn't get too antsy for the next record just yet. "Our songs go through so many revisions," says Colleen. "People are always asking for new music. I want to be one of those artists that puts out

new music all the time, but honestly I think we're a little hard on ourselves. I'd like to release more stuff but I'm really picky about what people hear."

And as far as whether the more rocking direction of What We Are will continue in the future, that's an affirmative. "Not unnaturally," she says. "I write pop choruses, and I think that's what makes us radio friendly and more mainstream, so I'm not going to stop doing that. But we're just going to try to be in a more focused rock direction."

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