



Deborah Anderson

JAMIE CULLUM

In pursuit of diversity, he finds an explosion of creativity

YOU CAN'T MISS THE SYMBOLISM IN the cover of Jamie Cullum's new CD, *The Pursuit*, even if you try. In the foreground stands the artist, nattily attired, his facial expression somewhere between anger and mischief. Behind him, occupying roughly two-thirds of the cover's real estate, is a grand piano in mid-explosion, wood splinters and ivory keys flying through the air with abandon.

"We're always fighting with each other, me and the piano," Cullum explains with a chuckle. "It never does what I want it to do. And this time we fought so hard that I had to blow it up."

Call it a sacrifice in the name of art. And thank the beleaguered instrument—on which, it must be said, Cullum is supremely proficient—for taking one for the team. *The Pursuit* is the London native's most impressive album

to date, his most mature and stylistically diverse. Now 30, Cullum took a four-year break after his last release, *Catching Tales*, during which he "went to the pub and played football and jammed with friends, saw a lot of music and read a lot of books, did a lot of dancing, went to a lot of parties."

He also woodshedded in his kitchen, devising a plethora of ideas that would result in a wildly diverse new album. *The Pursuit* finds Cullum swinging madly on the Cole Porter-penned opener "Just One of Those Things," reimagining Rihanna's dancefloor hit "Don't Stop the Music" as an epic pop-jazz workout, rocking forcefully on "Mixtape" and going all electronica-reggae on "We Run Things," the latter two among the eight original Cullum compositions in the 12-song set.

"I think my previous albums have always hinted at this level of diversity," Cullum says. "Part of my identity is very much being able to put my feet in different camps and make it all sound like one musical whole. Hopefully this album doesn't sound like someone who hasn't decided what he wants to do, but like someone who has very *much* decided what he wants to do."

Despite its hybrid approach, *The Pursuit* is Cullum's most cohesive work yet—and a confident move toward the future. "I'm happy because I haven't taken a step back," he says. "I think I've made decisions based on creativity rather than commercial gain. I'm one of the lucky few musicians who can make a living doing this. I get to play for people who enjoy my music and are interested in what I'm doing."

"People talk about the gift of being a musician. But being able to do this as your work, that's the gift!"

—Jeff Tamarkin