

Q&A



Nick O'Malley, Jamie Cook, Matt Helders, Alex Turner

Sebastian Kim

ARCTIC MONKEYS

The English indie rockers dive into an R&B groove on their new set

FOUR ALBUMS—AND SEVEN YEARS—after releasing their debut, *Whatever People Say I Am, That's What I'm Not*, the Arctic Monkeys' latest record, *AM*, finds the band tapping into R&B melodies to shake up their guitar-driven sound. "We started with, 'What if you go with Aaliyah melodies and riffs from Black Sabbath?'" says frontman Alex Turner. "Some of the grooves in that world matched up perfectly with those melodies. That was the initial idea, but then we began to experiment." Lending a hand with the experiments were producer James Ford, Bill Ryder-Jones, Josh Homme, and Elvis Costello's drummer Pete Thomas.

What's the genesis of the album?

Last summer we went to Joshua Tree for a couple of weeks to gather our thoughts and start cooking up something. And we worked right through to May this year. It's been a long road. The majority of the recording was done in Los Angeles. You could say we browned the garlic and softened the onions, but the roasting was done in L.A.

Why do you always select James Ford?

He's been involved with every record—he's sort of like the fifth member. He knows how

to navigate the flying saucer. We finish each other's sentences at this point. This record is a lot more of a studio record. The records we made up to now sound like a band playing, and I think this one is less so. We were following elements of different corners of the musical universe, putting together some chemicals that don't usually mix. There's delicate balance in that. To do that I thought it would be best to have a producer we understand but who also understands us.

Were you aiming for an R&B feel?

There was this one song that was the impetus behind the whole thing called "R U Mine?" that we previously put out. We were experimenting more with vocal production and borrowing some tricks and scales from contemporary R&B. I call them "two-way pager melodies"—the kind of melodies that accompany lyrics about two-way pagers from 10 or 15 years ago, like Aaliyah, Ashanti, Mya, things from that world. There's this thing they always do with some of that music where a backup vocal echoes in time, and then lingers around. The chorus on "R U Mine?" borrows that move. All that vocal production was the most exciting part of

that song. We wanted to make a record that surrounded that. So the R&B thing was there from the beginning.

How did Bill Ryder-Jones end up on the record?

Bill's a good friend and a really terrific guitar player and a great songwriter. He put out his own album, which we all love. "Fireside," the song he's featured on, is probably the most melancholic moment on the record, and I wanted a guitar part that reflected the longing that song addresses. Longing is like a liquid, and it's not something you sail smoothly through. It seems to have a rolling boil to it. I wanted the rhythm of the song to reflect that feeling.

How about Pete Thomas?

It was a product of circumstances. Matt [Helders] busted up his hand, and he couldn't play—but we wanted to keep experimenting to work out the knots in the songs. So we had Pete come down and had a great few weeks. He's a great guy and a fantastic drummer. There are some tunes on there that, without his enthusiasm, wouldn't have come to fruition.

—Amanda Farah

'We were following elements of different corners of the musical universe.'

