

SPOTLIGHT



Jonathan Wilson

DELTA RAE

Lots of tours—and sibling clashes—created their unique multivocal sound

Grant Emerson, Brittany Hölljes, Ian Hölljes, Elizabeth Hopkins, Eric Hölljes, Mike McKee

DELTA RAE'S SOUND IS HARD TO classify, admits vocalist-guitarist Ian Hölljes—who makes up one-sixth of the North Carolina-based band. "We have genre ADD; we have no loyalty," he says, before naming Kanye West, the Eagles, Fleetwood Mac (whose Lindsey Buckingham played guitar on the band's 2013 single "If I Loved You"), and even the HBO show *Game of Thrones* as inspiration.

"What we do have are great pop songs with organic textures, so I think of our music as neo-Americana. But people have called us everything from country and bluegrass to pop and rock, and even blues. It really depends on where you're coming from in terms of music. For us, it's just the melding of all the different genres that we love."

It has taken five years and two studio albums, including the recent *After It All*, for the band—which includes Hölljes' siblings

and fellow vocalists Eric and Brittany Hölljes, fourth vocalist Elizabeth Hopkins, bassist Grant Emerson and drummer Mike McKee—to hone its unique sound. "We started out as a live band and toured a lot before we became interested in recording," Hölljes says. "Live is where we're most at home—it's where the concept of the band feels most natural. A band with four lead singers is overwhelming for radio, but it makes sense live, where the harmonies come together."

Finding harmony offstage is another story, especially when three siblings are involved. "We argue a lot," Hölljes says with a laugh. "We're all opinionated. But it yields the best product for us—conversations and deliberations get us the best result. We've discarded peace for allowing passions to fly at all times. It can be exhausting, but it's a part of our artistic process, and we've embraced it."

When it comes to songwriting, however, Ian and his brother Eric are firmly in the driver's seat. "I don't like group writing," he says. "A lot of stuff gets diluted when there are six people in the writing process—you don't get a cohesive idea or bold concept. So Eric and I usually present an idea to the band and then work through it with them."

"The surprising part of the process," he continues, "is how the songs we create end up in a certain singer's hands. For example, 'Chasing Twisters' has a macho gunslinger vibe, so I thought I'd sing it. But Liz came to me during a rehearsal and said she wanted to give it a try. She sounded a lot better, so it was an easy decision to have her record it. Plus, it's a lot more interesting to have a female voice on such a badass Western song. That flexibility is one of the unique advantages our band has."

—Katy Kroll

