

SPOTLIGHT



Ben Ottewell, Ian Ball, Tom Gray, Paul Blackburn, Olly Peacock

GOMEZ

Who are their fans? You might be surprised—they certainly are

HOW CAN YOU PICK OUT A GOMEZ fan from a crowd? Answer: You can't. "No one can identify our audience," declares guitarist Tom Gray, one of Gomez's three singers and four songwriters. "That's certainly the case at gigs. If you took people in the audience out of the room and said, 'What do these people have in common?' you'd have a hard time figuring out what it was."

That diversity is testament to the English quintet's sound—the mix of indie rock, pop, soul and blues heard in full flower on *Whatever's on Your Mind*, the band's seventh and latest album. "We very much wanted to make a quirky record—something a bit more infectious and eccentric," Gray says. That meant self-producing, with friend Sam Farrar of Phantom Planet pitching in as co-producer. "When we work with a producer, they have a tendency to iron things out, and we didn't want to do that. We wanted it to make more left turns."

Because the five band members are spread across the globe—Gray, bassist Paul Blackburn and singer-guitarist Ben Ottewell remain in England, while singer-guitarist Ian Ball and drummer Olly Peacock live in Los Angeles and New York, respectively—they wrote the new material online, sending

snippets of songs via the web. "We've used similar approaches before, but this is the first time we've really refined the process," Gray says. "We gave ourselves six months and had to write songs every couple of weeks. We all had to keep working on each other's stuff."

While online communication has a reputation for fostering passive aggression and all-out rudeness, Gray and his bandmates didn't squabble over whose songs were getting the most attention. "That's never really been a consideration," he says. "On the last record I only wrote one song, but I wrote six for this one. Sometimes your own stuff just isn't what's cooking, and sometimes it is. You can't be precious about it."

Gray is especially fond of the disc's title track, an earnest, string-laced ballad that, once completed, gave the band license to stretch out and try some lighter, funkier jams. "Once you've got a really big song like that, it's like, 'The rest of this could be easy,' Gray says. "It's funny how some songs take the pressure off others. We have a tendency to overwork things if we haven't got those bigger songs in place."

—Kenneth Partridge

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