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SPIRITUALIZED

Crossing continents in a quest to find the heart and see the light

JASON "J. SPACEMAN" PIERCE, frontman and guiding light of English rock band Spiritualized, adamantly disagrees with those who think music must follow rules. After all, he's been swirling rock, R&B, pop and more into richly textured sonic landscapes throughout his career. But there's one rule in

which he believes fiercely: There's a delicate but real division between good music and bad music. "The difference between Patsy Cline and god-awful barroom music is very, very slight," he says.

That's one reason he slaved for so long over Spiritualized's seventh and latest album,

Sweet Heart Sweet Light—he wanted to make sure his band "comes down on the right side" of that divide. A self-confessed obsessive, Pierce spent more than two years traveling around Wales, Los Angeles and Reykjavik to record with various players. Then he took another year to mix the record, all in anticipation of taking his show on the road again. "I love touring," he says. "I love the spirit nature of music when you play live. Night to night it changes. When you can tour no longer, you get the next album out." That's where the obsessiveness comes in. "Every time you do, it's like going into battle," he says. "I forget it is a horror, blasted at you, just a nightmare at times."

But the drive to create an album that encompasses "some of what I get from the music I love" overcame his resistance to ride back into battle. When he did head into the studio, Pierce modeled his ethic on musical heroes of the past who harbored lofty ambitions. "Some of my favorite records are far-reaching, because people were reaching for the stars," says Pierce, 46. "The list goes on and on."

Perhaps it was a near-fatal bout of pneumonia he endured several years ago—a topic he prefers not to discuss—that prodded him to look backward for inspiration. To help prepare for making the new album, Pierce and company performed the entirety of Spiritualized's 1997 classic *Ladies and Gentlemen We Are Floating in Space* on the band's most recent tour. The experience reconnected him with the inspirations of his youth. "I wanted to make one of those albums that embrace pop music and embrace melodies," says Pierce. "It was a way of saying 'thank you' for that music."

—Nancy Dunham

