

SPOTLIGHT



Alex Greenwald, Michael Runion, Z Berg, James Valentine, Jason Boesel

JJAMZ

Five successful artists go from musical friendship to supergroup

IT'S A STEAMY SUMMER AFTERNOON, and Elizabeth "Z" Berg is in a van with the rest of the newly formed band JJAMZ, ready to embark on a 24-hour trip from Austin, Texas, to Billings, Mont. "Well, I'll get a book read. That's a positive," Berg chuckles. "Somehow I am built for tours, which is good because I can't do anything else."

Not that she's ever needed to try. As a teen, the daughter of former Geffen A&R executive/record producer Tony Berg formed the Like with two friends. After three EPs, three albums, a contract with Geffen and tours with Phantom Planet and Kings of Leon, the trio went on hiatus in 2011. "The thing with JJAMZ is there's a bit of magic in it in my mind," says Berg, who formed the group with buddies Jason Boesel (Rilo Kiley, Bright Eyes), James Valentine (Maroon 5), Alex Greenwald (Phantom Planet) and solo artist Michael Runion. "All our other bands broke up or went on hiatus at the same time and allowed us to make it a real band."

Not that the five, who recently released their debut album *Suicide Pact*, had planned a group when they hung out together. "I have known these people for so long and been a fan of their projects since I was a kid," says Berg. "They're pretty much my

four best friends. We never did anything productive until we finally said, 'Hey, we have the makings of a band! Let's do something besides drinking beer and singing karaoke!'"

The result is 10 power-pop songs with Berg's lilting lyrics leading the way. JJAMZ's sound isn't satin-smooth—there are alt-rock accents throughout—but it's no New Wave revival ala the Killers or Metric, either. Imagine putting the sounds of all the members' former bands into a mixer and hitting puree—the result fits together neatly even though the songs were written at various times, sometimes after a night of partying. "All the songs were written in such different ways," says Berg, "but they were all collaborative and organic, which makes it so fun."

"I read this great review the other day that said the name JJAMZ sounds like a discount shoe from the '90s, and it does!" she continues. (The name is taken from the bandmates' first initials.) "We said it almost as a joke, but it captured the spirit of fun and spontaneity. It's representative of not taking ourselves too seriously or being too self-important. Letting things happen naturally and having fun is the only way to make music."

—Nancy Dunham

JULY/AUGUST 2012
MUSIC & MUSICIANS
MAGAZINE

AVETT BROTHERS | JOHN LYDON | CAT POWER | GASLIGHT ANTHEM

