

Zeus

PRESS KIT 2012



arts & crafts

Rolling Stone MUSIC

Exclusive Album Premiere: Zeus, 'Busting Visions'

Toronto band returns with second album



Toronto's Zeus play a rootsy, melodic brand of rock that earned the band consideration for Canada's Polaris Music Prize upon the release of their 2010 debut, *Say Us*. They've been issuing a steady stream of singles leading up to the release of their second album, *Busting Visions*, which comes out March 27th. In the meantime, you can stream the full release exclusively here.

Could Toronto's Zeus be the next great Canadian band?

BEN CAPLAN

At a sound check at Toronto's Horseshoe Tavern, with beers on their amplifiers, Zeus rips through their new album, *Busting Visions*. They switch instruments, obsess over sound levels and noodle incessantly across the past six decades of popular tunes. Zeus have been touted by Broken Social Scene's Jason Collett as the next great Canadian rock band and now they're headlining Friday night's marquee event at the end of Canadian Music Week. For the four musicians from small town Ontario, the group may finally be arriving at a sound they've been working toward since they were kids.



"I woke up the other day and something felt different. I can feel it, potential, and it makes for some nervous energy," says Neil Quin, 26, one of three members of Zeus who writes songs, plays bass and guitar and also sings.

"We've definitely put in our time and rose up through the ranks," adds Mike O'Brien, 31, who fell in with his bandmates when Afie Jurvanen, who records as Bahamas, left their group to play stadiums with Feist.

Will Zeus ever play larger arena-like venues, like throwback rockers The Black Keys?

"If the god's are willing," says Carlin Nicholson, 31, smiling. "We're going to need all the gods willing at once."

Zeus released their first album, *Say Us*, in 2010 and found themselves not only nominated for the Polaris Prize, but winning XM The Verge's award for album of the year. They spent two years on the road and opened a studio on Toronto's east side, where they continued to hone their three-part harmonies and work on their retro-leaning, early-Stones sound.

“People are excited to see a group with that kind of power who’s not onstage with a laptop, doing what’s supposed to be done,” says Kevin Drew, the Broken Social Scene singer who puts Zeus out on his label, Arts & Crafts. “Sometimes you forget to rock out and it takes a group like Zeus to remind you what’s real.”

The day after Zeus closes the Horseshoe, they play a gig at Sonic Boom, the downtown record store immortalized in *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World*. It’s raining outside and the guys are tired — Toronto moves last call to 4 a.m. during CMW — but again they tear through the complex arrangements of *Busting Visions* like a Rottweiler let loose from its cage.

“The musicianship comes in handy because you don’t have to think about playing and you can let it go onstage and play with adrenaline,” Nicholson says.

“We’re a better band now because as musicians we’ve all matured.”

Influences on *Busting Visions* include Little Richard and Michael Jackson, and if the band used to sound like The Beatles, the new record has them moving toward Queen. “Music junkies doesn’t begin to express what these guys are like,” Juno Award-winning rocker Sam Roberts says. “They’re annoying to tour with because they’re always showing up all the holes in your own capabilities.”

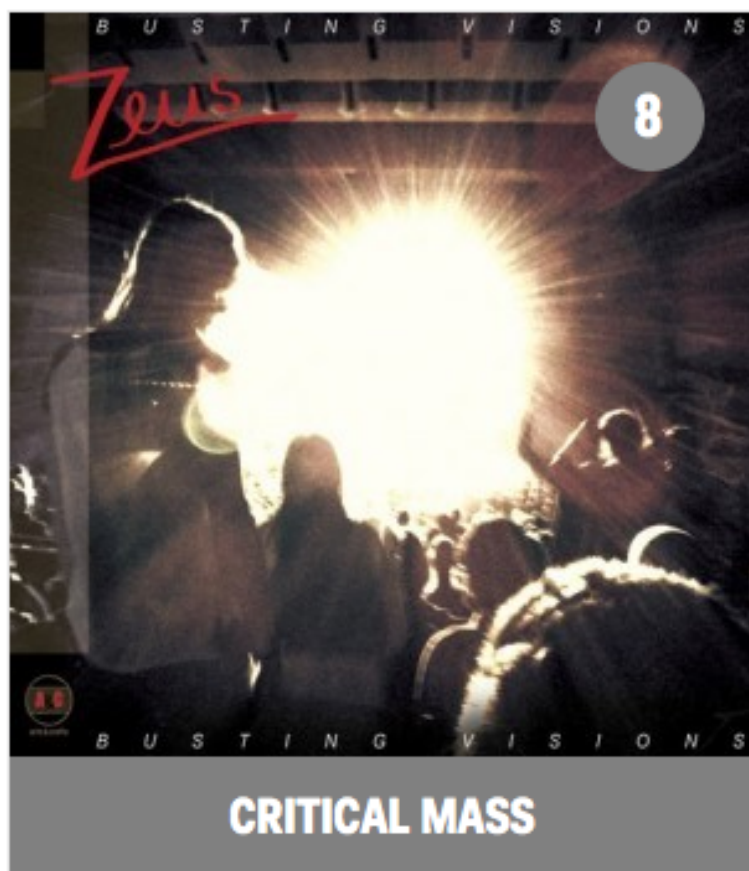
Next month, Zeus leaves to tour Europe with Dan Mangan and then returns to Canada on May 22 to plays shows from British Columbia through Saskatchewan to Ontario. From there, the band hits summer festivals, including the Ottawa Jazz Fest, Hillside and Osheaga, with other offers still being confirmed. The guys say that, as musicians, they feel like they’re peaking, and while their sound may be coming back in vogue thanks to The Sheepdogs and, to some degree, Adele, they’re happiest about how their relationship has evolved as friends.

“I grew up with three older brothers and I never imagined that I’d go through that again,” Quin says. “I’m going through that again.”

“In terms of popularity and stuff, this country will keep you humble,” O’Brien says. “You get to a point where people in your home town are aware of you and then you go to the next town and get your ass kicked again.”

Busting Visions by Zeus is out March 26 on Arts & Crafts records. For tour dates, visit arts-crafts.ca/zeus.


Zeus, 'Busting Visions'



SPIN Rating:

8 of 10

Listen:

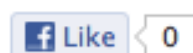
Spotify 

Release Date: March 27, 2012

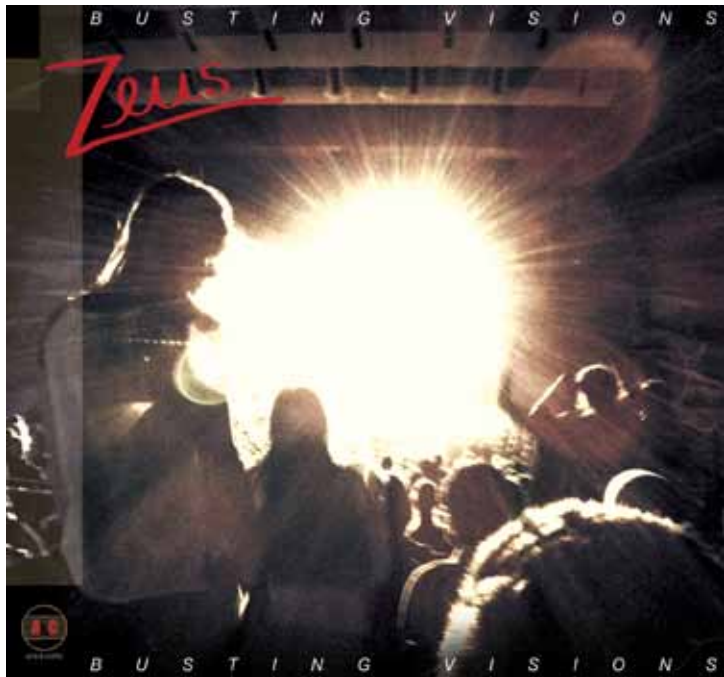
Label: Arts & Crafts

March 30 2012, 10:06 AM ET

by [Melissa Giannini](#)



Canadian prog-poppers giddily pull out all the retro-rock stops (cowbell, handclaps, harmonies, hooks galore).



Zeus Explain the Art of 'Busting Visions' and Their Desire to "Bring the Noise"

BY JESSE SKINNER

When it came time to pick a cover for their eagerly awaited and newly released sophomore album *Busting Visions*, Toronto quartet Zeus sought help from their audience. Their choice of cover photo, a fan image shot from a concert crowd, captures the performers in a burst of light. It's a bit obscure and a clean break from the hand-drawn aesthetic they've favoured for previous releases.

"It was a picture taken by a fan at a show in Red Deer, of all places," Zeus member Carlin Nicholson tells Exclaim! "It's the age of iPhones, and that's a no-nonsense shot. We didn't fuss over it at all."

The ubiquity of cellphone cameras may cause annoyance to some musicians, but Nicholson confesses to an unusual level of appreciation for fan-created media.

"People are filming like crazy. I think it's kind of great. It forces people to be in the moment when they should be, like it sharpens their attention," he explains.

If your attention wandered at all while listening to Zeus's 2010 debut *Say Us* have no such fears about *Busting Visions*. The album cuts back every last bit of fat in the band's sound, sometimes crowded by the blessing of three distinct, experienced songwriters. With it, they are poised to expand a fan base already wider than most "indie rock" acts.

"There's a distinct separation from us and what might be called indie rock," says Nicholson. Asked for his thoughts on further crossover success, he simply offers hope for the best: "It's most exciting to play in front of people who have never seen us and luckily there's still a lot of them left. We just need to bring the noise to whoever we can."

As previously reported, Zeus will be touring across Canada this May. You can check out those dates here, and head here to read more of Exclaim!'s recent Zeus interview.

Busting Visions is out now on Arts & Crafts.

Dan Mangan/Zeus Bush Hall, W12

To judge by the cheers when Dan Mangan mentioned the Toronto Maple Leafs' hockey team, this concert was a party for ex-pat Canadians. Mangan, a bearded troubadour type, is a big star in Canada, while the instrument-swapping Zeus is emerging as 2012's answer to The Band: a virtuosic four-piece with its own take on 20th-century American music. The appeal with Zeus is that you cannot tell whether their panoply of rock clichés are tongue-in-cheek or not. They are accomplished players, meaning any pastiche is of the highest quality, and just when you think they are going too far — with a cover version of *That's All* by Genesis, for example — they pull the music back into something more tasteful. Putting this into visual language was the bassist Carlin Nicholson. With his lustrous moustache and wavy hair he was a dead ringer for Tom Selleck in his Magnum P. I. period, particularly when he celebrated completing a tricky riff or keyboard part with a slightly raised fist.

Zeus played with such verve and joy that they made you reconsider some longunfashionable bands. It's been a while since Supertramp, Queen or indeed Genesis have been credible influences, but when Zeus played *Are you Gonna' Waste my Time*, from their new album *Busting Visions*, overblown rock from the 1970s and 1980s sounded like a good idea all over again. Perhaps that's Zeus's secret: they're well aware of stadium rock's lapses into bad taste, but that isn't going to stop them from loving it. The result was an extremely exciting gig in which each band member gave themselves over to the spirit of the moment.

On the surface Mangan seemed more unusual than Zeus, particularly given that not one but two members of his band, with their enormous beards and bulging craniums, look exactly like the Kentucky singer-songwriter Will Oldham. Mangan began with a noise freakout, at one point playing two guitars at once in possible homage to Spinal Tap's Nigel Tufnel, but then he settled into standard singer-songwriter material. "Robots need love too," sang the crowd, joining Mangan on the chorus for *Robots*, one of his big songs. Mangan's songwriting skills were clear and his fans filled the place, but it was Zeus's tunes that stayed with you at the end of the night.



Street level in Toronto

MUSIC

Zeus: Busting Visions

Arts & Crafts

BY: STUART BERMAN

GRID RATING: 7/10

USER RATINGS: ★★★★★★★★
★★



They may be named for the ultimate deity in Greek mythology, but on their 2010 debut, Toronto foursome Zeus worshipped at the altars of a different kind of golden god. Their idols: Paul McCartney, The Band, The James Gang, and pretty much every other scraggly-haired, unkempt-bearded rocker you'd find on FM radio airwaves between 1968 and 1973.

Zeus' sophomore effort, *Busting Visions*, however, nudges the band's internal calendar closer to 1974, when the likes of Queen and ELO were busy dressing up traditional rock in gaudier outfits. Of course, there's a fine line

between "inspired" and "indulgent," but *Busting Visions* mostly sides with the former by never taking itself too seriously. While these silly love songs may be overstuffed with jaunty barrelhouse piano lines, stereo-panned operatic harmonies, handclaps, string arrangements, and Brian May-esque guitar solos that hang in the farthest reaches of your left-ear headphone, Zeus still manage to retain the feel of an endearingly sloppy, Saturday night bar band that could ride off the rails at any moment.

The eternal conundrum of rock 'n' roll is how to translate spontaneity into studio-crafted art; even as they push their aesthetic towards the latter, Zeus show you can still have it both ways.

Playlist picks: "Anything You Want Dear," "Are You Gonna Waste My Time?"

Zeus play Arts & Crafts' CMF showcase at the Horseshoe Tavern (370 Queen St. W.) on March 23.



Zeus

Premiere: "Love/Pain" Live in Ill Eagle Studio

Apr 19, 2012

Watch on YouTube

Toronto-based rock group Zeus recently followed up their Polaris Music Prize-nominated debut *Say Us* with their new sophomore album *Busting Visions*. Apparently feeling that one time recording the record wasn't enough, the Canadian four-piece headed back into their Ill Eagle Studio not too long ago to capture the whole thing again, but time around live to tape. As an added bonus, over 10 cameras were put in place to capture the action, including this exclusive take of the band's song "Love/Pain."

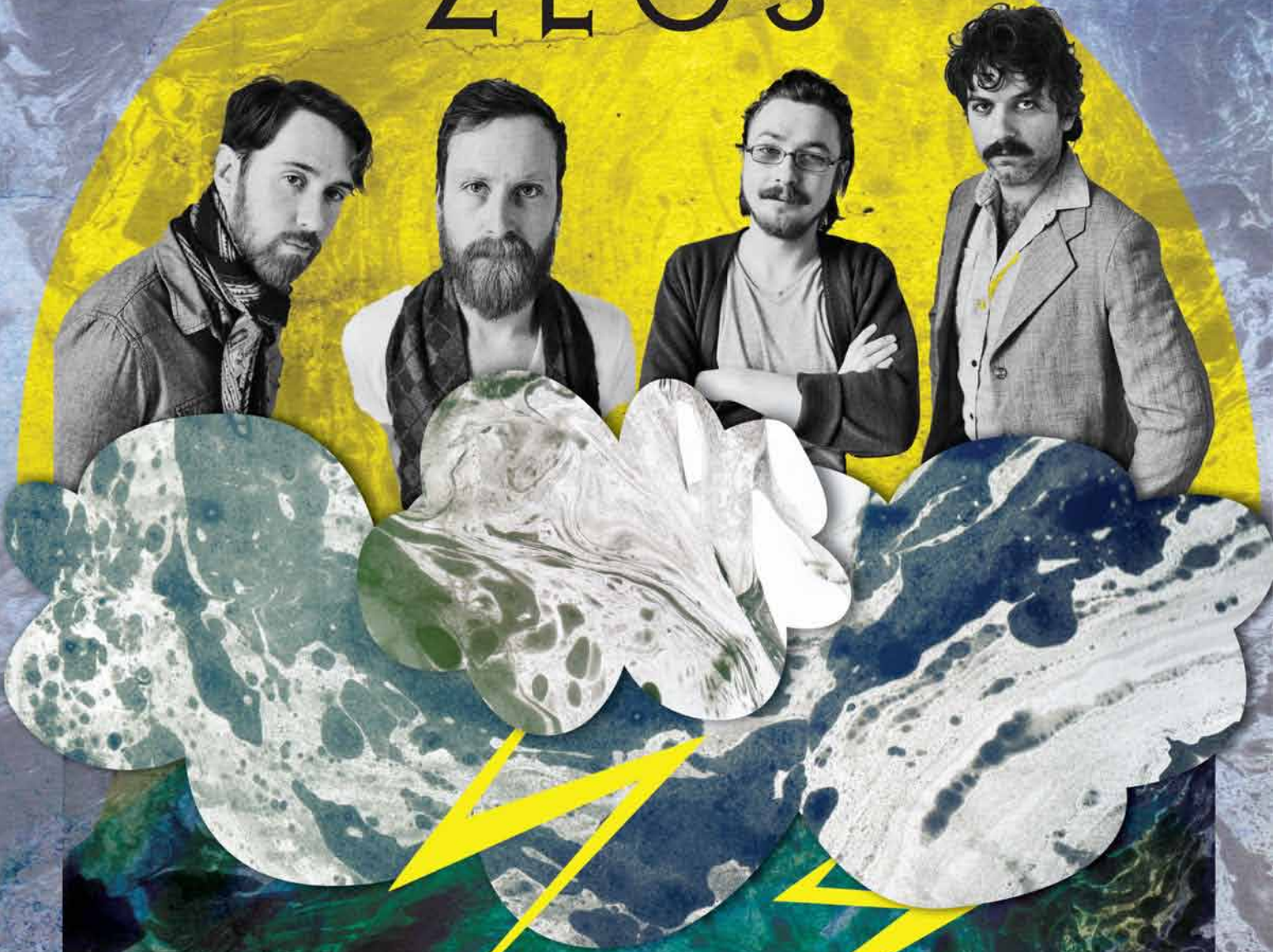
Dutch Disease! *Cosmopolis*! Save The Bats!
Secular spat! Food fight! Dance Congress! Deer Tick!

FREE
Feels Good!

Planet S

Saskatoon's City Magazine MAY 31 - JUNE 13, 2012 • VOLUME 10 • ISSUE 19

ZEUS



JASON COLLETT'S FORMER
BACKING BAND MAKES THEIR OWN
THUNDER

Zeus Channels '70s Sound Into Sweet Success

COVER STORY / BY CHRIS MORIN

Somewhere in the midst of a few sprawling, cross-continental tours, acting as the backing band for Jason Collett of Broken Social Scene, and releasing their second full-length album (titled *Busting Visions*), Toronto's Zeus have become indie darlings

That shouldn't really come as a surprise — they've been tapped as one of Canada's most promising young bands ever since they began, a mere three years ago in 2009.

Their songs have found a welcome home on the likes of CBC Radio, and their bizarre, charming video for the single "Are You Gonna Waste My Time?" has reached near-viral status.



All very cool — but it's the band's god-like live show, which typically sees them impulsively switching instruments while obsessing over vintage tones, that have truly put them over the top.

Musically, the band has struck gold by mining the radio-friendly rock sounds of the past five decades, all mashed up under flying rock kicks. Bassist Carlin Nicholson says that the successful formula has always been — well, not to have any formula at all, really.

"I think people are latching onto the sound of the songs," says Nicholson. "There are a few things at work there, but in terms of how the band works and how we've gotten to this point, I have to tell you it's all natural, man. We're not trying to look or sound in any particular way at all.

"I think what is old is new again. There was a period in popular music where people really wanted to hear the 'doo-wahs' or the 'doo-wah-wahs.' Our influences are obviously derived from those periods of rock and the stuff that we listen to. But that could be everything, you know — we don't think about it that much.

"It really can't be put into a neat little category."

Although the band is startlingly young considering how far they've come career-wise, the members of Zeus have been fighting the good fight in local rock trenches for years.

Nicholson and Mike O'Brien (Zeus' other chief songwriter) began gigging together in Barrie, Ont., before eventually meeting up with the other members to form Paso Mino, Jason Collett's backing band.

The association with Collett helped the collective Zeustians (yup — I'm making it into a word) gain a much-needed entry into the touring circuit, while also giving them some valuable stage time in front hugely receptive audiences. They've since parted ways with the ex-Broken Social Scenester, and Nicholson says that the band doesn't necessarily plan on going back to their original day job — although he never says never.

“In a recording capacity we can dedicate that time, but with our own tours there’s no way we have that kind of time to be able to back someone else while still being Zeus — and I don’t think we should even consider it at this point. That being said, if some people are bumping around town, then we might just put together a show. I think we’ll still be able to do stuff like that. We had a period where we felt like we needed to break away from the backing stuff and that’s fine, but it’s still really fun to do.

“I think when you back someone like Jason Collett in a certain capacity, people are going to want to know who that band is, and that really worked out for us and I am really grateful for it.”

The association worked out well indeed — although any success they’ve had since is obviously to their credit. After dropping an EP in 2009, Zeus released their first full-length album, *Say Us*, in 2010. They were quickly nominated for the Polaris Prize, and won the XM Verge award for album of the year. They were also picked up by the Arts and Crafts label in Toronto, which is run by Kevin Drew (another key member in Broken Social Scene).

Say Us was a fine introduction to the band, but their latest work on *Busting Visions* is by far their most realized songwriting to date.

Offering up an updated vision of ‘70s radio rock, Zeus plays smooth, muscular indie with an emphasis on vocal harmonies and rattling riff rock. Their noticeable classic rock overtones might be slightly off-putting to some (on their debut EP, the group covered a Phil Collins-era Genesis tune that could sum up a huge part of what they’re about), but the group lays down an infectious groove that is equal parts ‘70s rock, funk and R&B.

The influences-on-their-sleeves approach has garnered some fire from critics who demand originality from today’s buzz bands. Tough, says O’Brien — they write what they like, and record what they like best.

“We really didn’t want to overthink how we made the album, which I think explains why it felt like the same ideas or templates. It’s just the type of music that we’ve always enjoyed, and the type of music we’ve always played. Our approach to making this record was basically to just make a new Zeus record, and so we picked all our best songs. Usually those songs dictate the feel of the album and that’s just how it goes.

“This just happens to be our sound and how we’ve recorded these things with our set-ups. In one way, we’re just running sound through certain amps and mics, and what’s coming out of it is our sound — it sounds like Zeus.”

Detractors aside, things are definitely booming (hah!) for Zeus these days, with a growing (and generally rabid) fanbase across the country — and increasingly, around the world. O’Brien and the rest of the group are gratified that their hard work is starting to pay off — although the work is far from over, he says.

“I think we’re still trying to win people over all the time — there are still a lot of people out there who don’t know who we are,” he says. “And playing in front of an audience who’ve never heard of us is actually better sometimes. It’s fun when you have a familiar crowd, but when you’re playing for people who don’t know you, you really have to try and hit them with all your best moves and your best songs.”

“We’ve only had two shows in Canada on this tour so far, but it’s been really great,” says Nicholson. “People know the songs already, and those who don’t are really interested in learning about the new stuff. The crowds are getting bigger and I think we’re really fortunate that we’ve had everything aligning for us.

“It’s a celebration all around for us, because it’s going to be a good long tour.”



Tuneful thunder from a band called Zeus

Toronto's Zeus promise classic, catchy, twangy rock, and onstage they delivered

BRAD WHEELER

I asked a friend what she thought of Zeus, the Toronto power-pop quartet. She said the members were excellent musicians and that the band was great live, but that when she would

ask Zeus fans to name one of the group's songs or even hum one, they were unable to do so. Naturally, I told her to pipe down - that such scandalous talk would bring down the whole indie-pop world, a scene which thrives on songs that are tuneful, yet not entirely memorable.

Zeus's most recognizable song at the Mod Club Theatre, which at 600 people-capacity is a step up in venue size for a band with one album under its belt, was a robust cover of Genesis's *That's All*. "You've probably heard this one before," said one of Zeus's three fronting singer/multi-instrumentalists, "but never quite like this." He didn't quite have it right - the eventful, lurching cover version of the Phil Collins-written ditty has been a staple of Zeus's live shows - but you guessed what he meant: That the crowd first knew the song because it was a genuine radio-wave sensation - a hit from 1983, an age before most of them were even a crazy notion in their parent's Abacab-addled minds.

Here's what the band's official bio says: "Zeus draws upon classic influences to craft timeless songs, complete with fuzzed guitars and shimmering three-part harmonies; classic rock 'n' roll with a touch of twang."

Direct hit! Zeus doesn't lie. On stage, the band kicks it up a notch. Some of the shimmer of 2009's *Say Us* drops by the wayside as songs take on extra garage-rock grit and heft. The shaggy foursome, part of the Arts & Crafts family, showed those classic influences - including the Beatles, I imagine, and perhaps Fleetwood Mac and Electric Light Orchestra - while rolling through a sweaty, enthusiastic set marked by melodic pop done in blissful, rugged and crowd-thrilling ways.

Let's not mince words: Zeus is one of the finer live bands in this city.

The River by the Garden was quirky, with a laconic chicka-boom Johnny Cash thing happening. *You Gotta'Teller* began with a stomping psychedelic-funk intro (think the Temptations' *Ball of Confusion*) before moving forward to a Strokes-like verse. *Blame it On Me*, with its Rhodes organ set to a spongy tone, rode a muscular bass line and a sharp guitar riff.

Zeus gets a lot of Beatles comparisons - comparisons that, frankly (and naturally), flatter the group. More modern, Canadian comparisons could be made with power-pop colleagues Peter Elkas and Afie Jurvanen (who both appear on *Say Us*), or Sam Roberts.

As for my friend who questioned the hummability of Zeus, she might not know about *How Does it Feel?*, an agile, piano-pounding tune about a sad soul. Is it a standout track? Perhaps not. But if it doesn't stick out, it's only because Zeus has a wealth of solid material. It's just that they're all B-sides, not A-sides. It's the common condition of indie-pop, that's all.

Zeus, with Broken Social Scene, Pavement, Band of Horses and others, play Toronto's Olympic Island on June 19.

Esquire

Possibly Life-Changing Musical Discoveries from SXSW 2012

While Esquire was busy checking out some new favorites of our own — the guys from NPR Music were even busier, listening to absolutely everything again. Herein, the artists they considered worth sharing from Austin just now.

BY BOB BOILEN, ROBIN HILTON, ANN POWERS, AND STEPHEN THOMPSON

From Ann Powers:



Zeus

Remember the band Stillwater from the movie *Almost Famous*? Toronto-based Zeus is that band, if its members had included Paul McCartney and taken a lot more acid. As fun as 21st-century classic rock gets.

[CLICK HERE TO LISTEN >>](#)

PHOTOS

The Performances of SXSW 2012

Live shots from the tastemaking music conference



Aaron Miller

Zeus

Mike O'Brien, Carlin Nicholson and Neil Quin perform riffs of their new album, 'Busting Visions' at the Arts and Crafts Showcase at 512 Bar in Austin, Texas on March 16th, 2012.



Zeus (No 1,283)

This Canadian band's divinely daft pomp-pop is like a thunderbolt from on high

PAUL LESTER

Hometown: Toronto, Canada.

The lineup: Rob Drake, Carlin Nicholson, Mike O'Brien, Neil Quin.

The background: Sting, of course, would call it synchronicity. See, only last night we were talking to Peter Brewis of Field Music about Sparks, when we came

to the part of the conversation where we bemoaned the lack of imagination and ambition of today's bands. Where, Brewis wondered, were the "modal" pop songs comprising often wholly disparate sections of music? Whither the idiosyncratic songcraft that saw musicians dexterously assemble a smash hit – be it *This Town Ain't Big Enough for the Both of Us*, *Rubber Bullets* or *Bohemian Rhapsody* – out of multifarious connecting and frequently radically juxtaposed bits of sound? Whatever happened to the brainiacs, the Sparks, Queens and 10ccs?

And lo, it came to pass, we said, coming over all biblical with delight, within 12 hours an album fell into our laps verily like tricky pop manna from heaven, entitled *Busting Visions* by a Canadian outfit called Zeus. And it's fab, 70s vernacular intended. Zeus are the sometime backing band of Jason Collett of Broken Social Scene and they're signed to Arts and Crafts, but really they're not part of that Toronto scene as much as they are, ideologically and aesthetically, phantom peers of the aforementioned clever-clever British class of 1974-5. They had a previous song, *Marching Through Your Head*, and that's what their music's like: a series of hooks and choruses trampling across your auditory canal.

They're steeped in the music of the 70s that wasn't punk, disco, glam or prog: that vague, nameless genre that included Queen/Sparks/10cc but also ELO, Wings, Supertramp and Pilot. Groups that took the Beatles' studio fixation and zany smartness to extremes, bearded musos who weren't progressive or heavy as such but could knock out a dynamite riff or a sublime lick with the best of them, but seconds later would have moved on to something else. Zeus are longhairs, some with beards, they have lots of touring under their belts and they're skilled musicians, and as such they have something of the grizzled road-horse quality of fellow countrymen the Band. But this is the Band jolted into art-pop/prog-pop life.

Album opener *Are You Gonna Waste My Time?* recalls the rockier, raspier end of power pop and bands such as Blue Ash and Stories, the Raspberries at their Who-est or Big Star at their most crunchy. *Love/Pain* is a fantastic example of Zeus' divinely daft pomp-pop, all block harmonies and tight musicianship, like something you might see on TOTP2 from 1976 that you totally forgot about but makes you wish punk hadn't come along and ruined everything. *Love in a Game* is boogie as played by art school kids, with enough chops and changes to have kept turntable titan (and 10cc fan) J Dilla very busy indeed. There are songs here from outside the mid-70s pop-boffin schema, such as *With Eyes Closed* with its breathy baroque air that is pure *Zombies*, but in the main *Busting Visions* will be a field day for fans of nerd-pop (and Field Music).

The buzz: "Widens the band's influence-pool to include Queen, the *Zombies* and Wings" – avclub.com.

The truth: Expect pop thunderbolts from on high.

Most likely to: Rule the world.

Least likely to: Waste your time.

What to buy: *Busting Visions* is released by So on 13 August, preceded by the single *Are You Gonna Waste My Time?*

File next to: Pilot, Sparks, 10cc, Stories.

Links: themusicofzeus.com.

**Mayor Miller
on why his
opponents
keep lying** 14

**Olympic regret:
I can't stand on
guard for this** 16

**My online
dating dud** 18

movies

**Don Cheadle's
Finest hour** 60

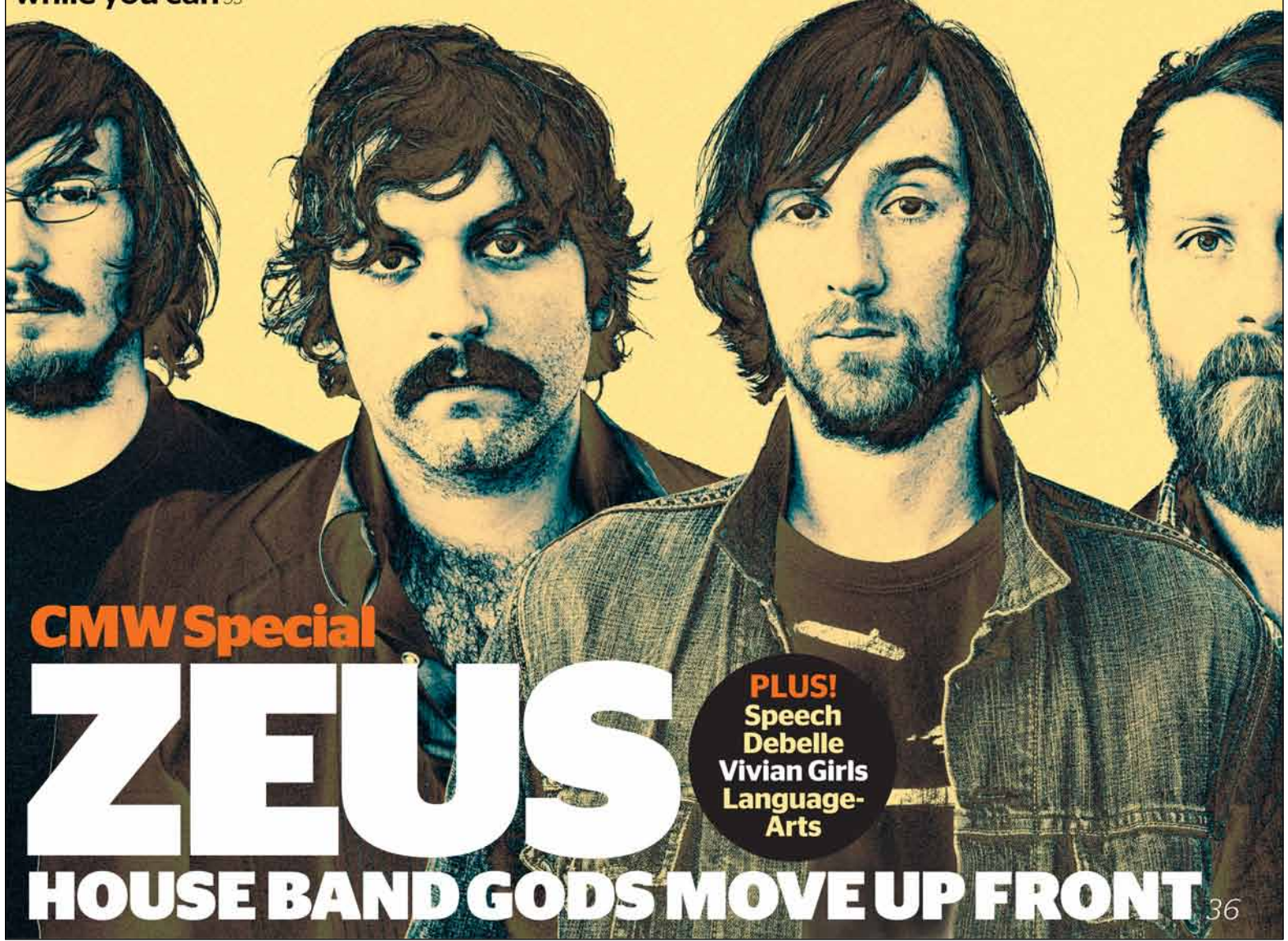
stage

**Book a Blind Date
while you can** 53

NOW

**NEED
A JOB?
CAREER
COMPANION**
page 74

FREE
EVERYTHING TORONTO, EVERY WEEK.
MARCH 4-10, 2010 • ISSUE 1467 VOL. 29 NO. 27
MORE ONLINE DAILY @ nowtoronto.com
28 INDEPENDENT YEARS



CMW Special

ZEUS

PLUS!
Speech
Debelle
Vivian Girls
Language-
Arts

HOUSE BAND GODS MOVE UP FRONT 36

COVER STORY

Canadian Music Week kicks off with the pure pop power of Zeus

By BENJAMIN BOLES



Zeus are diehard musicians. They'd find a way to keep playing even if you chopped off their hands. They're young, but they're definitely lifers, and that's exactly who you want in your band.

That single-minded passion for, and obsession with, playing as much as possible with as many projects as they can caught the attention of Broken Social Scene alumnus Jason Collett, who's since adopted them as his backing band.

Collett is on record saying the collaboration has produced the best work of his career. It's even been described as the contemporary equivalent of Bob Dylan and the Band.

"It's a good comparison – they're a good band," Zeus co-founder Carlin Nicholson says with a sly smile over afternoon pints.

But as good as the combo has been for Collett, there's a very real chance that it's Zeus who'll be getting the attention on their upcoming Bonfire Ball tour (kicking off Wednesday at Lee's Palace as part of Canadian Music Fest). Conceptualized as an old-fashioned revue, the show features Zeus as the house band of the evening, supporting both Collett and Bahamas as well as showcasing their own material.

That means they'll be onstage pretty much the whole evening.

"I'm mainly worried about going that long without smoking," cracks Neil Quin as the band takes a short breather between rehearsing for the tour and setting up for a gig later that night.

The house band situation presents the kind of physical challenge that intimidates most musicians, but chances are Zeus would be jamming backstage even if they weren't everybody's backup band that evening.

Even Zeus's origins come down to childhood chums Nicholson and Mike O'Brien killing time by making more music while their primary projects had some down time.

"Mike was playing in Paso Mino (Collett's previous band), and I was with the Sixty8ights, who weren't doing much at that moment," recalls Nicholson. "One of the members of Paso Mino took off and joined another band, and it left all this time, so Mike and I rekindled our musical relationship."

"There's some serious juggling going on with us, but why not make music with your friends when you can?" continues O'Brien.

Initially, Zeus was just a loose recording project for the two of them and whoever happened to be coming through their busy recording studio that day. Eventually, they realized the songs were strong enough to be played live, so they drafted Quin (who brought a bunch of his own songs to the table) and drummer Rob Drake.

The resulting album, *Say Us (Arts & Crafts)*, brings to mind a different classic rock institution than the oft-cited Dylan/Band comparison. The lush three-part harmonies, tightly constructed arrangements and rock-solid hooks sound more like the Beatles than anything else.

But while it's obvious the band has seriously studied the Fab Four, it's tough to bait them into admitting that they've got some major retro tendencies.

"We're not trying to be the Beatles or anything like that. We're just making the songs and arrangements that sound best to us," Nicholson protests.

"There are a lot of albums that would have sounded 'throwback' if the artists had managed to record them the way they wanted to.

"The other day, an interviewer was talking about how you can feel bad about not listening to that cool new wave band you're never in the mood for, but you always feel like listening to Zeus. It's just rock and roll, done our way."

He does have a point. No matter how hip the indie band, if they're travelling kilometres in a tour van, classic rock generally ends up winning the battle for the stereo. If this is the music you enjoy listening to, why not make it? Especially when you're good enough to pull it off.

"There's pressure to change your style every few years based on whatever is happening at the time, and certain brands of rock and roll were never fully explored as a result," muses Quin.

"It's an area of music that's been ignored for a while, and I'm not really sure why," continues Nicholson.

"All songwriters have accumulated some representation of every music they've heard and liked. We're just trying to make Zeus sound like what we think sounds the best."

So they don't want to sound like *The White Album*; they just want to reference it. That might not produce the most original and unique-sounding record, but it does make for an honest-sounding one.

Besides, this is the kind of album you unconsciously find yourself playing on repeat. Isn't that what we want from a pop record?



Album Review: Zeus Busting Visions

BY DAVID DILILLO

By fine-tuning a mix of sweet pop rock and determined guitar chops on their second album, *Busting Visions*, Zeus has become more focused and, in turn, more enjoyable; this is the one that'll bring the band's sound into its own.

You can't call their brand of rock heavy and hard so much as energetic and ear-grabbing. Brewing cavalier pop with hushed funk, Zeus at times emulates both French pop-rock masterminds Phoenix and the less alt-country iterations of Blitzen Trapper with their fun class of jumpy rock. The Toronto four-some's slight classic rock tendencies, previously courted on their debut, *Say Us*, to adequate results, become strengths here.

On "Hello Tender Love" – one of the jewels of the album, channeling the now-defunct NY funk band Julius C – the band pumps a powerful, soul-dripping chorus through an excellent transition into the McCartney-like playhouse affair of "Messenger's Way". This isn't nearly the only clever moment on the record, but it sure sticks with you the most.

Recalling songs like the laid-back "The Renegade" from 2010, the pleading "Let It Go, Don't Let It Go" echoes the bittersweet melancholy of Steely Dan's saddest lyrical moments, and "Proud and Beautiful" is another brief softie with a tender swagger. The band's earnest attitude makes for eclectic instrumentation that never offends but only knocks you off your feet if you're truly paying attention. Overall, elements like harlequin piano chords, guitars imitating kazoos, and click-clack percussion could have been embroidered to greater detail.

The more outward moments on *Busting Visions*, such as opener "Are You Gonna Waste My Time?" and "With Eyes Closed", recall groovy, romantic joy from decades ago, and on "Cool Blue (And the Things You Do)", Rob Drake, Mike O'Brien, Neil Quinn, and Carlin Nicholson play as a more theatrical, spaced-out Spoon, with lingering jazz harmonies, vocal grit, and resounding bell chimes. Keeping up with this boldness and experimentation could yield future material worthy of Mount Olympus.

Essential Tracks: "Let It Go, Don't Let It Go", "Hello Tender Love", and "Strong Mind"



Video Premiere: Zeus - "Are You Gonna Waste My Time?" (Live from Ill Eagle)

BY HILARY SAUNDERS

For their second full-length album, Canadian rockers Zeus went back to the garage. Created at the Ill Eagle Studios in East Toronto, proved to be the perfect place to record *Busting Visions*, the follow up to the band's 2010 Polaris Prize-nominated debut *Say Us*.

Members Mike O'Brien, Carlin Nicholson, Neil Quin and drummer Rob Drake not only recorded *Busting Visions* at Ill Eagle, but they also filmed the entire album for a 10+ camera shoot. Filmed, directed and edited by Brett Long & Winston Hacking, the results of those sessions are raw, offering authentic footage filled with the band's entertaining banter. The album's opening track, "Are You Gonna Waste My Time?," is a riff-heavy number that drips with '70s classic-rock appeal.

Busting Visions is now available via Arts & Crafts. Check out the live clip of "Are You Gonna Waste My Time?" below.

ALBUM REVIEWS

ROCK

- **Busting Visions**
- Zeus
- Arts & Crafts
- Three stars

This is sharp-edged power-prance – some wild trip, oh yeah. The co-writing, instrument-swapping Torontonians and Feist producer Robbie Lackritz dazzle with know-how, Queen-and-Sun King-worshipping harmonies and retro-touches (With Eyes Closed is dusk-lit, back-in-the-day British psychedelia). The melodic presence of cohort Afie (Bahamas) Jurvanen is nicely felt throughout. On the jaunty and flowery Stop the Train, Neil Quin sings “stop me if you’ve heard this before / I can tell you look kinda bored.” Sure, it’s a touch derivative, but boring it ain’t. Punch my ticket, Zeus, I’m in for the full ride. Brad Wheeler

PREMIERE: ZEUS PERFORMS “WITH EYES CLOSED” AT ILL EAGLE STUDIO



Between their mastery of glowing harmonies and bounty of facial hair, Zeus have all the making of a truly great Canadian rock band – an assertion recently made by Canada’s National Post. That’s why we’re happy to premiere a clip of the boys doing what they do best, performing “With Eyes Closed” off of their 2012 sophomore album *Busting Visions*.

Recorded at their very own Ill Eagle Studio, the grainy clip captures the group’s tight musicianship and penchant for catchy and affecting melodies. Clear the area around your feet to ensure for obstacle-free toe tappin’, and check out the clip below.

Busting Visions is out now via Arts & Crafts.



ZEUS

Toronto, Ontario

Earth Rock Revival

www.themusicofzeus.com

The members of Zeus have already logged countless miles on the road since formerly gigging as fellow Canadian singer/songwriter (and onetime Broken Social Scene member) Jason Collett's backing band. "Jason saw promise in [us] and helped facilitate the connection with [label] Arts & Crafts," says multi-instrumentalist

Carlin Nicholson of the quartet's formation in 2009. "What you see when Zeus performs is a pure product of how excited we are," he says. "No one ever fakes it—in Zeus, I don't think we're capable of that." The band, which draws influence for their "earth rock revival" sound from the likes of Ween, The Kinks and Queen, released their sophomore album *Busting Visions* in March. "We get a kick out of using both new and unused material," Nicholson says of the vintage hooks and harmonies, fuzzy riffs and changing tempos that comprise the album. "Everything around you offers inspiration if you see it that way," he says. "Positive or negative—love or pain—or just a moment of quiet. It's all yours to use if you want it."



Zeus – Busting Visions

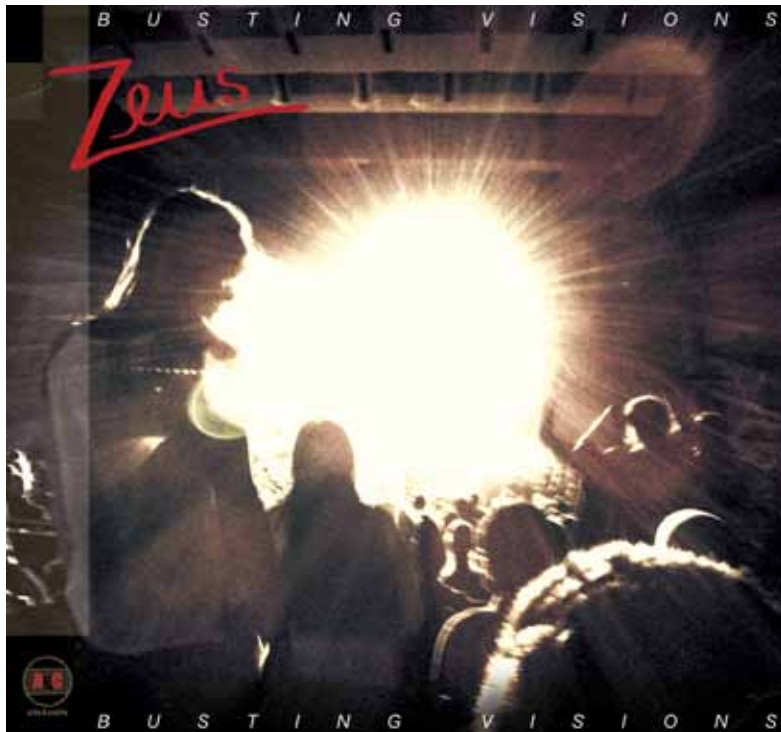
(Arts & Crafts)

By BENJAMIN BOLES



ZEUS play the **Horseshoe** Friday (March 23) and **Sonic Boom** Saturday (March 24) as part of CMW.

NOW RATING: **N N N N**



The first time I heard Zeus, I dismissed them as a Beatles-obsessed retro act. That's not inaccurate, but weeks later, when I couldn't stop listening to their 2010 debut, *Say Us*, I had to admit that, though shamelessly derivative, they'd come up with a highly addictive collection of well-crafted pop songs. There have been big stylistic changes between their debut and *Busting Visions*, but the band still provokes the same contradictory reactions. *Say Us* sounded like a love letter to 1969, but *Busting Visions* comes across as the same band sometime in the mid-70s. Already many are saying this is the Wings to the Beatles-obsessed *Say Us*, but it's closer to what we imagine the Fab Four might have sounded like had they not broken up. At first, the complete lack of restraint and overflowing musical ideas make *Busting Visions* feel a bit like an unfocused mess, but once you get familiar with it, it seems absurd to complain that they've crammed a dozen golden hooks into every single song. Don't let their retroisms scare you off before you learn to love it.

Top track: Hello Tender Love



Zeus: SXSW 2012 Blog

Toronto's Zeus seemed to have the right idea about this year's SXSW: a good soak in a hot tub after every long day hauling equipment around and racing through short sets.

The prog-leaning rockers, who began as Jason Collett's backing band, release their sophomore album, *Busting Visions*, on March 27 on Arts & Crafts and used their time in Austin wisely, not just playing scads of shows, but checking out friends like

Yukon Blonde and The Sheepdogs and loading up on a year's worth of BBQ.

The Alternate Side asked Zeus' Mike O'Brien if he'd keep a blog of the band's mythic musical and gastronomic travels through Austin:

We started our trip down to Austin from Halifax NS, which is "normal routing" from what we understand. After 4 days in the van, we couldn't be happier to step out into the Texas sun. To commemorate our arrival, Carlin threw on Neil's leather USA jacket and struck a pose, which managed sum up our collective feeling about being at SXSW.

Day 1 included checking into our rental house, dubbed the "Hot Tub Hideaway" because of the sweet tub in the backyard. Afterward, we picked up our wristbands at the convention centre and hit the Canadian Blast show under a tent just down the way. We ran into our buddy Rich Aucoin, who played after us. We also chatted with The Sheepdogs after their set. Our set was quick and dirty and it felt good to unleash some of the pent-up energy that had accumulated in the van. O ya, the Zeus boys were feelin' a little pent-up. We hooked up with our pals from Bahamas and enjoyed the first of many more tacos. That night, we went to St. David's Church to watch Bahamas kick out the jams. It sounded so crushed up and smashed out in there, it was the perfect setting for Afie's sparse arrangements. Nice one, guys!

Day 2 we grabbed breakfast in the neighbourhood before heading down to our gig at Dizzy Rooster on 6th Street. After a bit of negotiation, we got the van down close to where we could load into the club. It was a classic South By gig. Loading in minutes before hitting the stage, we rocked out a sweaty set to the afternoon beer drinkers.



Afterward we stumbled out onto the street into the hot sun where the Balconies were doing an impromptu set on the street. That night we went out to take in some bands. First stop was the huge crowd at the Shins show. The screens looked good, but the stage was nowhere to be seen, so we moseyed on to catch the last bit of Yukon Blonde's set. They sounded amazing and we had a good old bro-down with the boys afterward. After that, we headed over to the East side of 6th to check out the soul man Lee Fields. This was the stand-out show for us at South By. His band had some of the Daptone guys who play with Sharon Jones and who played on Amy Winehouse's record. They were unbelievable. One of the best sounding live bands I've ever heard. After that we headed back to the church where Plants and Animals were playing, and we did a little bit of stone-cold chilling with Afie from Bahamas and our friends Virginia and Sarah Harmer before making the long walk home and back to the tub.

Day 3 was a two-show day. In the afternoon we played the Brooklyn Vegan party, which was probably one of the smallest stages we've ever crammed ourselves onto. Right before our set, Carlin and I caught the last couple songs from Eleanor Friedberger (the singer from Fiery Furnaces). Really awesome stuff. We slammed down another tight Zeus set for the folks at the Brooklyn Vegan jam ... had some more tacos ... drank some whiskey and beer then headed across town to load into the venue for our Arts & Crafts Showcase. After one of the stinkiest loads ever through a back alley that smelled like flowing rivers of dumpster juices, we made ourselves comfortable on the rooftop patio and surveyed the scene that we would later be rocking into the ground. Before the show we went to grab

a coffee and chilled out at The Radisson. Even though we weren't necessarily staying there, it was a necessary part of the evening. We went back to the club right in time to take the stage and set up. The room was packed with friendly faces, and Zeus was feeling the magic hour feeling. The show was a total triple-A-plus rocket ship all the way! The vibes were killer, so we hung out at the club into the wee hours and then made our way back to the hot tub for a well earned soak.

Day 4 - Everyone was feeling a little punched out. We had a session to do, so we got some coffee and cruised on down to the session where we ran into Dan Mangan and the boys. We played a couple of acoustic jams and chatted with Jeff Leake through bleary eyes. Then it was BBQ time! We hit Ironworks for the meat sampler plate. Tasty ribs! Dang! The boys needed a nap after that, so we went back to the hideaway and took 'er easy for a few hours. That night we went to a great club called Lustre Pearl, where we played at this outdoor backyard stage for the Ground Control party. Ground Control are our booking agents in the US, and they're great folks! They also know how to throw a great party. It was the perfect way to cap of our SXSW experience. We stayed there and drank beers and tequila and slammed back another taco for good measure. It was a great night. We capped it off with a final soak in the tub, secretly dreading the drive home but trying not to think about it. All in all, a pretty sweet time .. thanks Austin!

Reviews

the *Victims of Hiroshima* and 1961's *Polymorphia*. It is no wonder why Stanley Kubrick utilized them for the creepier moments of his masterful 1980 adaptation of Stephen King's *The Shining*. Penderecki revisits both works in this mesmerizing collaboration with Radiohead guitarist **Jonny Greenwood**, who cites the famed Polish composer's early avant-garde years as a primary template for his own film scores. The density and contrast between these classic Cold War-era compositions and the Greenwood pieces directly inspired by them—*Popcorn Superhet Receiver* and *48 Responses to Polymorphia*—are imaginatively performed by graduates of Poland's Katowice Academy of Music alongside conductor Penderecki with a sinister seamlessness that counterbalances the beauty and horror of this groundbreaking teacher/student alliance.

Ron Hart

Zeus

Busting Visions ARTS & CRAFTS



"You peeked into the future/ And it all looks the same," Canadian pop-rock chameleons

Zeus sing on their colorful sophomore effort. And they ain't lying—throughout these 14 retro gems, this hard-working quartet clearly doesn't draw lines between the future and past of good ole fashioned pop. To these guys, a hook is a hook, and *boy* do they have plenty to spare. With a sound that echoes just about every classic pop-rock combo from the '60s and '70s (including ELO, The Zombies, T-Rex and those swingin' cats from Liverpool), Zeus won't score any points for originality, but *Busting Visions* is simply overstuffed with highlights—like the sweetly soulful slow-jam "Let It Go, Don't Let It Go" and the psychedelic guitar rocker "Strong Mind."

Ryan Reed

Hush Arbors & Arbouretum

Aureola THRILL JOCKEY



Blindfolded or downloaded without a tracklist, one might not even notice that

the new album *Aureola* was actually a split LP between New England woods-folkers **Hush Arbors** and drone-psych

Off The Tracks ON THIS MONTH'S CD

Alabama Shakes

Boys & Girls ATO



Since the **Alabama Shakes** were already being hailed as the saviors of the blogger, hippie, soul-revival and NPR scenes based on their incredible live show and a memorable Bandcamp.com page, their debut album almost feels like an afterthought. Which is a shame since *Boys & Girls* is the type of honest, independent minded, almost-retro album that should be passed down from older siblings and through college dorm halls to fans looking for a gateway into the Southeast's sonic history. Even on record, lead singer/guitarist **Brittany Howard** manages to capture both the wild, bluesy energy of Janis Joplin and the sultry, soulful polish of Sharon Jones, while the band as a whole are rightful heirs to their home state's classic Muscle Shoals sound. But, in the best possible way, *Boys & Girls* is also just accessible enough to serve as a perfect entry point into those rich musical legacies, filtering the band's soul, blues, R&B and Southern rock influences through the kaleidoscope lens of the Bonnaroo generation. The album's most infectious song, "Hold On," is more tailored for a late afternoon festival tent than a rowdy bar and "I Found You" will likely make it onto more than a few romantic summer iPod playlists. Let's hope that *Boys & Girls* allows Alabama Shakes to grow naturally. *Mike Greenhaus*

heavys **Arbouretum**. There's an audible change midway through, of course, when the songs suddenly turn from golden and sun-dappled to epic and fuzzy, but—in everything including name—the two bands play as two parts to the same idea. Hush Arbors, a prolific one-man outfit led by songwriter **Keith Wood**, covers surprising territory over five songs in 18 minutes, from *Blonde on Blonde* joy ("People and Places") to echoing ache ("The Sleeper"). Arbouretum's first track breathes naturally out of Hush Arbors' last, but exhales into a pummeling drum fill and the LP's dreaminess gains a slow, metallic rumble underneath ("New Scarab"). And, except for the last track ("St. Anthony's Fire," in which the listener finds herself in a weird Allmans/metal fantasia), it's surely the same dream, and a nice one, too.

Jesse Jarnow

Lori Carson

Another Year

BLUE KITCHEN/
UNITED FOR OPPORTUNITY



While Adele receives grand and deserved notice for her heart-on-the-sleeve performances, NYC singer/songwriter **Lori Carson** has been exploring introspection since the early 1990s when she took the lessons that Joni

Mitchell's music taught her and turned them into her own garden of intimacy. *Another Year* is Carson and guitarist **Paul Pimsler** working through a gorgeous song cycle where melody caresses the forlorn and "Cracked and Broken Things" obsess Carson on a recurring basis. A peerless vocalist whose best moments disappear into the night air, Carson writes tunes that resemble letters from a dear friend who sticks to her own path regardless of what the world thinks. The open heart confessional, "I'm the One Who Runs," could have been a lost track from Mitchell's *Blue*. (Yes, it's that good.) *Rob O'Connor*

Various Artists

Treme: Music from the HBO Original Series, Season Two

ROUNDER



HBO's *Treme* digs into New Orleans' fertile musical soil with great gusto and real authenticity. The series' second soundtrack album is the real deal, naturally, with 18 performances capturing the city's sound, circa now. Street-beating brass bands are here, with tracks by **Rebirth Brass Band** and the **Hot 8**, and the **Dirty Dozen's** collaboration with **Juvenile** on *Galactic's* raucous, rapping "From the Corner to the Block," recorded at

FREE ACROSS CANADA | MARCH 2010

exclaim!



JASON COLLETT AND ZEUS

COMMUNITY COLLAGE

PLUS WHITE STRIPES | GIL SCOTT-HERON | BESNARD LAKES | TED LEO | BROKEN BELLS & MORE

Jason Collett & Zeus From Scene to Shining Scene



BY VISH KHANNA

After spending the entire day playing music with some of his closest pals, Carlin Nicholson has a well-worn grin on his face when he opens the main door to Ill Eagle studio as widely as he can. It's unseasonably misty for a Canadian winter night and Toronto's east side is damp and cool, making Nicholson's offer to enter the recording facility he co-owns all the more welcoming. Inside, he and his band mates in Zeus are running through songs with their close collaborator/occasional bandleader Jason Collett, in preparation for their upcoming Bonfire Ball Revue tour across North America. Collett and Zeus (Nicholson, Mike O'Brien, Neil Quin, and Rob Drake) each have stunning new records to unveil and, after playing countless shows together around the world over the past few years, their fates are intertwined.

With Nicholson and O'Brien handling production, Collett's sessions at Ill Eagle conjured his best solo album in *Rat a Tat Tat*—a dynamic marriage of his folk gravitas and hooky pop finesse. The latter, in particular, has been bolstered by members of Zeus and their extended family of musical friends, including former band-mate Afie Jurvanen

of Bahamas. With no pretence or cautious hesitation, the boys in Zeus are unabashed proponents of timeless pop and rock'n'roll and they're sticklers about it, executing the styles brilliantly on their self-realized, full-length debut, *Say Us*.

As a member of Broken Social Scene and a savvy social convener in Toronto's arts community, Collett convinced his label Arts & Crafts to take a chance on Zeus and get behind their work. A loyalist and peer booster, he's been embraced by strong communities before and sees a new one blossoming among Zeus and their contemporaries. Best of all, the chemical reaction so necessary to making musical ventures thrive appears off the charts here; on an aesthetic and interpersonal level, Collett and Zeus are locked into something grand together. Still, with the unique Revue tour looming, there's some work to be done.

"Let's run through that one again and then take a break," Collett instructs, after a reasonable stab at one of his new songs, "Long May You Love." Even six hours into this rehearsal, Zeus simply nod jovially before playing the infectious, shuffling march of a tune that much better.

Until quite recently, these young men have been best known as Collett's backing band, a role they still relish for its challenges and recognition. But after a decade of different monikers and configurations, something special's been brewing for Zeus lately. Nicholson and O'Brien are suddenly in-demand producers; Ill Eagle's been a hub for bold sounds by friends like the Golden Dogs, Danielle Duval, and Collett. And thanks to extensive touring, Zeus are now one of Canada's best live bands, tapping into the textures and tones of the Beatles or Wings or ELO to get at something all their own.

With "Long May You Love" completed, Collett takes a seat in the live room with an air of satisfaction about the day's accomplishments. "It was good," he says of the practice, "but I'm a little rusty. These guys are all top-notch but we haven't rehearsed in... it feels like a year. Now you have to figure out how to play the record you made, the nightmare you made. It's a lot of fun and we're all really excited. You hear people whining about what a tough life this is. I always wonder if any of them have ever sanded drywall before. Now that's a hard day's job; this is never a hard day's job."

After operating in the relative obscurity of Toronto's underground singer-songwriter scene throughout the '90s, Collett became an auxiliary member of Broken Social Scene, witnessing the power of galvanizing visionaries toward a common purpose. As such, he's been a uniter many times over, spearheading unique Toronto meet'n'greet's like the annual Basement Revue at the Dakota Tavern, which brings disparate artists together for rare collaborations. Even the Bonfire Ball revue is designed to offer fans a unique experience, as Collett, Zeus, and Bahamas join forces to play intermingling sets, popping up to perform songs together all night, as opposed to just ploughing through their respective material and then waiting for the show to end. "It'll be three hours of raw madness, so go to the bathroom before the show starts," Nicholson warns fans.

"Yeah, we're all now in bladder training ourselves," Collett adds, chuckling.

Physiological peril notwithstanding, the Ball promises to be

an endearing demonstration of how musical camaraderie can lead to something strong that still hangs loose. That same mentality drew BSS and its label Arts & Crafts into existence and brought Collett into Zeus's circle of friends. "When you're working in some kind of informal collective or community or family of musicians, you really are encouraged to grow more and stretch further in your own work, because you're inspired by others around you," he says. "It struck me then and it continues to be an important lesson for me to be engaged in a community of musicians who become your best critics. They challenge you in a good way and it's a healthy environment."

Back in Ill Eagle's control room, the members of Zeus are partaking in just such an academic exercise by listening to the 68s, an early band featuring Nicholson and O'Brien. It's not just a trip down memory lane; they're studying the songs. "Mike and I are still honing our style," Nicholson explains. "With every new band we record we learn the fastest way to get the best out of them. It's taken years to figure this out. The first studio we had was built in '95 and we've built them in every place we've lived. If you do it for long enough, you just get better and better."

When they discuss their chemistry together, Zeus and Collett use words like "charged up," "sparked," and "juiced." Energy is a huge thing for them, a force that has propelled them to this point. For Collett, the experience is meaningful but echoes others in his musical life.

In the early part of the last decade, as Toronto experienced an underground cultural renaissance, Collett launched a songwriter series called Radio Mondays. Future members of BSS were simultaneously starting to mingle and feed off the work of their contemporaries. Collett befriended Kevin Drew and the two began working on songs informally. Drew invited Collett to join the Social Scene, which he eventually did, and his life changed forever when the band took off, jolting his own solo career in the process. "The biggest impact on me was that there was a certain spirit with which things were done that resonated around the world at the very beginning," Collett says. "I feel really lucky to have been a part of something that does that. It doesn't happen very often in one's life."

In a smaller but really exciting way, Collett feels the same intangible bond with the boys in Zeus, who seem more than ready for their close-up. Hailing from the Big Bay Point area of Barrie, Ontario, Nicholson and O'Brien played in a couple of bands with a fellow named Afie Jurvanen beginning in the late '90s. O'Brien and Jurvanen eventually left to form Paso Mino, who caught the ear of Toronto musician and producer Howie Beck. When Collett was looking for a guitarist, Beck recommended Jurvanen. "Afie kinda pulled a Robbie Robertson," O'Brien recalls. "He said 'You can have me but you have to take the rest of my band.'"

"He pitched it more like, 'Have I got the band for you,'" Collett recalls. "And that was very ballsy and presumptuous but I thought, 'Well, what the fuck; let's check 'em out.' So when I went to the rehearsal space, they'd not only learned [my] whole record but they'd rehearsed it without me and had all the finesse down. So, it was done, bang I just walked into a band I'd been playing with for ten years."

After Jurvanen left to play guitar with Feist (and eventually perform as Bahamas), Paso Mino endured some line-up juggling before finally consisting of O'Brien, Nicholson, Quin, and Drake. The quartet felt something particularly powerful about their dynamic. "The name came from us saying that everything sounded like 'Zeus juice' in the studio," O'Brien explains. "Someone would lay down a bass part and someone else would be like, 'Aw man, the bass sounds like Zeus.' Carlin and I put together a band for a show that [songwriter] Peter Elkas asked us to play. He was like, 'I'm making the poster. What's your band's name?' The first thing that came to mind was Zeus and it stuck."

The band cite East coast icons like Sloan and Thrush Hermit as early influences but eventually explored old school, '60s templates to hone their own timeless sound on Say Us. "Jay said it best in that Zeus songs are in a zone that nobody's tapped for a long time," Nicholson says. "Like, the very intentional back-up 'ooh-wa-wahs' with no fear of doing it on stage, y'know? There are a lot of angular bands that don't do that but I find that even those guys are into this stuff; even the hardest rocking dude will say 'I like the Band, I like Neil Young.' So how come no one sounds

like that any more? I mean everybody I know listens to that old stuff. So where is it? Why am I not hearing any new stuff like that?"

With their critical eye and reverence for music, Zeus exhibit a passion that even surprises a vet like Collett. "These guys don't stop playing, like in a playful way. They finish a gig and the guitars are still going in the dressing room, the hotel rooms they're going in the fucking lobby at 8:30 in the morning when we're heading out with hand-overs. They're going in the van. It's non-stop; it's relentless. For these guys, music is just fun and it should be expressed all the time."

Collaborating has led to a creative explosion for both Zeus and Collett. With a bold achievement like Say Us under their belt, Zeus find themselves savouring the long-hoped for moment with one eye towards their next move. "I'm just excited to have it come out and hear it on vinyl," Nicholson says of Say Us. "It's such a huge triumph for us to have it out properly."

"But we're all excited about recording another album," O'Brien adds. "All of us write a lot. Carlin alone probably has 100 songs in his back catalogue and right now, we probably could record all of our albums for our entire career. But it might never happen," he exclaims with a chuckle. "No, we are excited about making another record but I'm most excited about playing live. Having your record out and having people know the songs brings a whole other element to the live show. When people are familiar are with the material, it's gonna get them just as charged as us and have a nice flow of energy for the live shows."

While the young band is understandably wide-eyed about impending opportunities, for Collett, the union with Zeus and the vision of Nicholson and O'Brien has led him to a great record in Rat a Tat Tat. "I firmly believe that this is my best work," he says. "I feel because I've been plugged into this scene that's hitting its stride, it's charged me to hit a whole other stride. It comes back to that notion that we're sparking off of one another and there's really good friction going on in this scene. I think it's really healthy to be plugged into."



Zeus

BY EVAN SCHLANSKY

Here's a first for our ongoing Writer of the Week series — dual answers from dual songwriters. Toronto-based rock band Zeus have been racking up acclaim for their third album, *Busting Visions*. *Esquire* went as far as to say they're "as fun as 21st century classic rock gets." We asked Carlin Nicholson and Neil Quin about *Busting Visions*, their all-powerful band name, their approach to songwriting and more.

Carlin Nicholson:

What's the story behind the band name?

We had recorded many songs before we even really knew we were a band. A friend of ours — Peter Elkas — asked us if we'd like to play a show with him. We had no name. Mike stammered his way to Zeus and so it was. We would make reference to many silly things through word games in the studio as in: "Sounds like juice, sounds like Zeus' juices...sounds like ZEUS."

How does the songwriting process work in the band?

It's a bit different for every dude how the song actually comes in, what stage it's in at that time, etc. But the end result is always something that pleases us all and we all worked to make ours. Three songwriters makes for a lot to wrangle, but we love the challenge.

Who are some bands with multiple songwriters you admire, and why?

Kinks, Beach Boys, Sloan, Superfriends, Dr. Dog, Queen. I think the reason why we like bands — at least the ones that stay with us — almost always boils down to good songs and great albums.

What's a song of yours that's really touched people?

There always seems to be a song or two at every show that we upset someone by not playing. (Not that upset.) It is a great thing to move someone in a way that they feel so much for that they need to just come and talk to us about it. Off of our last album, "Kindergarten," "Fever Of The Time," and "River by the Garden" are all songs that have repeatedly come up in some way or another. Whether it be a cover, a request, or just a real strong feeling for, it's great.

When did you start writing songs? Were they good right away, or did that come later?

Umm, I started writing when I started playing an instrument that played notes (i.e. not drums). So I guess that was age 13 or 14. I'm sure there were a lot of misfires... haha. But like now — you pick through the material and sift through to find the ones you feel strongest about.

What's a song on your Busted Visions your particularly proud of?

I love the sound of "Love In A Game". It was a new one when we started recording and kind of just rushed its way to the front of the pack of my songs we were most excited about. We planned a lot about the recording as well with our friend Robbie Lackritz – we had a very specific drum sound in mind referencing Little Richard and Queen, and Robbie wrangled it real nice-like. Very proud of all the elements of that song in performance, sound and arrangement.

What's a lyric on the album you're especially proud of?

"Half hearts don't produce in the start it's up to you to complete it with yours" – "Messengers Way"

I just like the idea that there is a half heart roaming around somewhere in the world – and that you hold the other half of it. Unless you make that bold move to follow your deepest instincts, you may never find it. Leaving two halves to forever pine.

Neil Quin:

Are there any words you love, or hate?

I think every word has it's place somewhere. I think maybe the name Skylar is a bit jarring (sorry to any Skylars reading this, I can't help the way I feel).

What's your typical approach to songwriting? Do you revise a lot, or do you like to write automatically?

Every song is different- but as long as the main idea of a piece is there, then the song has practically written itself. It's really just a matter of time spent and hopefully some lovely surprises along the way.

What sort of things inspire you to write?

Love in all of its forms. Family and friends are very important to Zeus, and I think a lot of our songs are a tribute to that notion

What's the last song you wrote or started? Tell us about it.

It's a song called "The Long Way" and I wrote it on an old parlor organ I have in my house. I love the sound of the bass foot pedals on it and I was playing around. All of a sudden I had a new song.

Who are your songwriting heroes?

Stevie Wonder, Freddie Mercury, Paul, John, George, Robert Smith, Prince, Ann and Nancy Wilson, Michael Jackson and so, so many more. Too many good ones.

Who's an underrated songwriter in your opinion?

David Gahan from Depeche Mode. They have some really wonderful songs.

What do you consider to be the perfect song?

"Signed, Sealed, Delivered." Perfect for weddings, car rides, nice nights at home, bbqs, you name it. You would have to be in an exceptionally bad mood to not light up when that song comes on.



Bill's SXSW Friday recap in cameraphone pics (Evaporators, New Build, Youth Lagoon, Django Django, Doldrums, Light Asylum, Moonmen on the Moon Man, Little Roy, Bleeding Rainbow + more)

BY BILL PEARLS



I caught only the last song of Exitmusic and wished I'd seen the whole set, it was terrific: swelling, swooning pop. I spent the whole time asking myself where I knew the lead singer from. Did she work at a bar in my neighborhood? Was she a customer at the video store where I sometimes clerk? Duh, Aleksa Palladino was on Boardwalk Empire as Michael Pitt's wife. Given how good they are, hard to say which is her day job. After that was Toronto's **ZEUS** who fit the vibe of the Volstead perfectly with their late-'60s Britpop sound. Very Zombies and Kinks, with some killer electric piano.



Zeus

Despite releasing its Polaris Prize-nominated debut *Say Us* two years ago, indie rockers Zeus consider the follow-up, *Busting Visions*, to be its first true release as a band.

As co-founder Carlin Nicholson recalls, it all began with himself and childhood friend Mike O'Neill messing around in their studio, Ill Eagle prior to Neil Quin and drummer Rob Drake joining the lineup. What began as jamming in the cramped studio space on Toronto's scrappy east end quickly escalated into a record deal and a new

path for the group, which has included opening for Metric, Sam Roberts, acting as backing band for Broken Social Scene alumnus Jason Collett, and a European tour with Dan Mangan.

"The album itself was made in a time of uncertainty and we just didn't know we were a band, we didn't know we were making an album that would get released," Nicholson says of Zeus's debut. "Whereas this one, we had been a band for two years already, you know, learned a lot about ourselves, about our songs, about our music, about the world around us, and we had a calculated move to go into the studio as Zeus and record it."

The old-school vibe of Zeus's sound has drawn comparisons to the Beatles and other prominent acts from the '60s, a comparison Nicholson says the band doesn't shy away from, but at the same time, doesn't set out to embellish. He notes that everyone who listens will come to their own conclusions, but, ultimately, the band just writes and records what they think sounds best. If it draws Beatles comparisons Nicholson views that as a fine reference.

A great deal of the vintage sensibility stems from the band's approach to harmonies. Rather than setting up each vocalist with their own mic and monitor, the guys split two microphones between three voices.

"There's something about singing beside the guy that you're singing harmony with that glues the harmonies together better," Nicholson explains, adding that, while he appreciates good sound production, there's a common opinion amongst the band that they'd rather avoid any trickery and just play. "To be able to use our studio as another instrument that we strap on is kind of what makes the sound so close to what we hear in our heads ... we don't over think it. We don't fuss too much."

It's with this simplistic approach in mind that the band continues to record at its own studio, splitting some of the recording at label-mate Leslie Feist's "cottage" with longtime collaborator Robbie Lackritz. *Busting Visions* gradually evolved into a collection of tracks old and new, incorporating numerous influences ranging from Stevie Wonder to the Beach Boys to Sloan.

"It's an accumulation of everything we've listened to and those songs just happen to be the songs that we chose to do at that particular time," Nicholson says, adding that had it been recorded six months earlier or six months later the end result would have been completely different. "It's truly a product of the time it was recorded in."

ZEUS

Say Us

ARTS & CRAFTS. CD/DOWNLOAD

OUT 10 JANUARY

★★★

*Broken Social Scene
spin-off's spin-off.*



Not to be confused with the '90s Cuban heavy metal band, this Zeus came together as the

backing band for Broken Social Scene's Jason Collett on his last solo album. Ditching the country stylings of his *previous* backing band Paso Mino's moonlighting work, Say Us is heavily influenced by The Beatles. Their three lead singers and their equally impressive multi-instrumental abilities tilt these 12 tracks in the direction of Brendan Benson's finely crafted power-pop and, in the case of Fever Of The Time, the punchy Kindergarten and garage rocker You Gotta Tell'er, they deserve even wider attention than their former employer enjoys. **ANDY FYFE**

**DOWNLOAD: Kindergarten //
Fever Of The Time**  **50**

Zeus

Say Us

(Arts and Crafts)



Zeus has been a bit quiet of late. Since a young lad called JC came along, nobody seems to subscribe to the whole 'multiple deity' understanding of things. It's just a shame he's had to put out an album to attract attention to himself again. Hang on, say what? That's not what this is? Ahhh, my mistake.

No, it turns out this Zeus began life as Jason Collet's (Broken Social Scene) backing band – and thankfully they've made a superb record which offers a great deal of diversity.

The album features layers, harmonies and dollops of Americana along with some bona fide crackers thrown in to the mix – and that's not to mention the fact they've got three singers.

LP highlight 'Kindergarten' is good enough to warrant playing over and over, containing explosive piano driven chorus, lush harmonies, a 'Back in the USSR' style rhythm and a crescendo ending; "We got fire within us!" they bleat, and you wouldn't disagree.

'The Renegade' builds up to a bar room sing-along complete with drunken handclaps, while the jilted Johnny cash-esque clip clop guitar of 'River by the garden' morphs into Gram Parsons territory. Later on, 'You Gotta Tell'er' slaps you in the chops with its stabbing organ and some serious heavy riffing. It simply keeps you guessing.

Ed Spencer

ZEUS

Say Us

ARTS & CRAFTS



Jobbing Canuck sessioneers step up to the plate

Initially formed as a backing band for solo work by Broken Social Scene's Jason Collett, Toronto-based Zeus merge the dextrous musicianship of The Band with the broader pop sensibilities of Jellyfish or Matthew Sweet.

Enthusiastically leafing their way through a history of hooks'n'harmonies, they invoke the spirit of John Lennon's plaintive slow rock side on "Greater Times On The Wayside", grind out an organ-led garage band groove on "You Gotta Tell'er", and get all coy on the hippy strum of "The Sound Of You". Three democratic singers/writers (Mike O'Brien, Carlin Nicholson, Neil Quin) result in pleasingly variable tones of light and shade.

Terry Staunton

Daily disc: Zeus, Say Us

By Ben Kaplan

Zeus, Say Us

Feel good boogie-woogie thumps on the album debut of [Zeus](#), a Toronto-based four-piece bar band that's been backing up Jason Collett and selling out local shows. The record, featuring slide guitar, steel pedals and jukebox harmonies, is a hummable mix of classic rock and psychedelia featuring [Marching Through Your Head](#), an addictive lead single which has already been called "pop song of the year," by Exclaim! magazine. Highlights include *Greater Times on the Wayside*, *Heavy on Me* and the single-malt smooth *The Renegade*, with its nasty high-fret guitar lead which rises from the honky-tonk rhythm piano to recreate the buzz of the British Invasion. Embarking on a tour across Canada with Collett and Bahamas, Zeus has taken the best of their influences and created a tangy new stew. Watch them murder [That's All](#) by Genesis at a theatre near you.15.

Zeus
SAY US

Arts & Crafts
Productions

★★★

*Infectious,
impulsive and
engaging...*



Zeus is a four part male rock'n'roll band, influenced by classic rock, pop hooks and gospel flavours alongside some country twang. Armed with some slick guitar licks and impressive songwriting styles, this record is an incredible mix of some techniques that on any normal basis wouldn't appeal to me. However, this band have everything going for them and their songs are infectious, impulsive and engaging.

Featuring Mike O'Brien and Carlin Nicholson as the principle members of the band, they are joined with Rob Drake and Neil Quin, a collective that offers three singer-songwriters who swap between guitar, bass and organ alongside Drake who manages the rhythm section of the band. SAY US was recorded and produced in their Toronto studio and showcases some wonderful tracks including *Fever of The Time*, with its catchy hook and gorgeous guitars, *The River By The Garden* with its country-esque slide guitar, and wonderful lyrical doo-wop sound, and *The Sound Of You* with its impeccable harmonies. **LB**
www.themusicofzeus.com

BLURT



03/16/2010

Zeus



Say Us

(Arts & Crafts)

www.arts-crafts.ca

When a lead singer opts to forsake his band in order to go the solo route, most fans will barely raise an eyebrow. But when a band breaks out on their own sans their front man, it's likely to garner more than a little curiosity. Happily, there's no bad blood between Zeus and their usual collaborator, singer/songwriter Jason Collett. In fact, there are plans for them to serve as his back-up band for his upcoming tour. Still, *Say Us* provides a welcome opportunity for Zeus to spin their own sound, proving they're equally adept at creating tuneful melodies, soaking up retro references and taking an easily accessible approach.

Even so, *Say Us* doesn't shy away from revealing some quirkier instincts, as evidenced by both its fidgety opener "How Does It Feel?" and the overt exuberance of "You Gotta Tell'er." Zeus coat their tunes with an effervescent sheen, resulting in a pervasive glow that immediately illuminates tunes like "The Renegade," "Marching Through Your Head" and "The Sound of You." Ultimately, Zeus' potential to reach Olympian heights remains to be seen, but even as mere mortals, they still manage to impress.

Standout Tracks: "You Gonna Tell'er," "The Sound of You" LEE ZIMMERMAN



Zeus step out from behind Collett to earn their own buzz

BRYAN BORZYKOWSKI
METRO CANADA

Friday Feb 26, 2010

The history of rock music is littered with backup bands. Some you've never heard of, but others, like The Band (Bob Dylan) and The Eagles (Linda Ronstadt), are at least as famous as the acts they supported.

While Zeus still have a while to go before they reach Hotel California status, they've already stepped out of their employers shadow.

For the last couple of years, the Toronto-based foursome has been Jason Colletts backup band, providing the tight, indie pop spine to the singers Dylan-inspired tunes.

The partnership has been a fruitful one Collett's never sounded better, while Zeus was able to learn a few things without the pressure of releasing their own albums. Jason was a real inspiration for arranging, says Carlin Nicholson, the bands bassist and co-founder. He's got this I don't give a s style that I love.

Not only did the group play with Collett, they recorded with him too, acting as producers on his latest record *Rat a Tat Tat*. It was natural to work with him in that capacity too they already know how the Broken Social Scene member ticks, so they didn't do as much arranging as they normally do when they produce other musicians.

A lot of trust has built up over the years with Jason, Nicholson explains. Wed just add harmonies and produce his esthetic. We know what he likes.

It was inevitable that the group would record their own music the members had released albums with other acts and after Collett played some of their tunes to his label, Arts & Crafts, the stage was set for the bands full-length debut.

Say Us is a retro pop album, taking cues mostly from classic Brit-rock. The album is replete with bouncy melodies, fuzzy distortion and 60s sounds, packaged together to feel a lot like a slick Arts & Crafts act.

They're already being hailed as the next big Canadian act, and that's a good thing for Nicholson, who's got no plan B if the music gig doesn't pan out.

I always assumed things would eventually happen, he says. Anything I do with my time that doesn't have to do with I want to be doing in 10 years time whether its playing or recording is counter productive.

Fortunately, its likely hell always be able to be a backup band. Even if they do make it big, the group has no plans to abandon their job with Collett.

Were going to continue to do that, he says. There are no conflicts there, even though Jay is our buddy, our manager and our boss.

CD REVIEWS

Zeus - Say Us

Arts and Crafts

Published February 18, 2010 by Nathan Atnikov in [CD Reviews](#)

In the ever-competitive battle for the position of Canada's most exciting new band, there's always a new darling poised to take over the throne. This week, *Say Us* throws Zeus firmly into the mix. After spending years cutting its teeth as Jason Collett's backing band, Zeus's debut full-length (borrowing three songs from last year's *Sounds Like Zeus* EP) is an exercise in more-comfortable-than-they-should-be rock 'n' roll confidence. Opener "How Does It Feel?" revels in studio gadgetry, throwing voices and instruments from speaker to speaker. "Kindergarten" toys with the perfect balance of fuzzed-out guitar and buoyant melodies. "Marching Through Your Head" sounds like it's been ripped right from the grooves of *Magical Mystery Tour*.

Zeus exudes an old-soul sensibility — its guitar tones recall The Beatles; its gang vocals The Traveling Wilburys; the march-ready beats courtesy of The Kinks. Of course, Zeus is still aspiring to those lofty comparisons, but the conversation has begun.

Zeus Step Into Limelight With New Album, Plan Tour With Jason Collett

Posted on Jan 5th 2010 11:00AM by [Jenny Charlesworth](#)



If you're a fan of [Arts & Crafts](#) mainstay [Jason Collett](#), chances are you've seen Toronto musicians Mike O'Brien and Carlin Nicholson in action. As members of the Dark Horse, backing band for the [Broken Social Scene](#) guitarist-turned-indie-troubadour, the pair has clocked some serious stage time since taking up Collett's cause in 2005.

Come February, O'Brien and Nicholson will get to enjoy a little limelight of their own with the release of 'Say Us,' the debut album from their personal project, [Zeus](#). "There's nothing quite like realizing your own music," O'Brien

tells [Spinner](#) from the Toronto studio that he operates with Nicholson. "And I think once the new record is out, people will realize there is more to the Zeus thing than just the backing band [angle]."

O'Brien may be thrilled about putting out the full-length — up for grabs exclusively on 180 gram 12" vinyl Feb. 9 and on CD Feb. 23, both via [Arts & Crafts](#) — but he makes it clear that the milestone doesn't compete with his longtime gig with Collett. "I've been a part of Jay's band for five years now and we're great friends so to be associated with him, well... it kind of feels as close to my heart as our thing," he says.

'Say Us' won't be the first time listeners get a taste of Zeus' infectious mix of Brit-pop and driving '70's rock. The quartet, which also includes Neil Quin and Rob Drake, made quite an impression with their 'Sounds Like Zeus' EP released last June. The inaugural effort was but a teaser for the kick-up-your-heels barn-burners featured on the upcoming long-player.

Does Zeus's rising profile spell the end of O'Brien and Nicholson's days as the Dark Horse? Neither one of the guys have any intention of giving that up. In fact, O'Brien reveals that there are actually plans for the two respective projects to head out on the road together, which would mean double duty for him and Nicholson.

"When the record comes out we're planning on a tour. We're going to start in Ontario and go down to [SXSW](#) festival in Austin and then tour up the coast and then go across Canada, and the plan is to actually tour with Jason," O'Brien says. "We want to tour with Jason and a good friend of ours called Bahamas, and make it more of a revue and less of three different sets. We'd like it to all flow together."

Say Us

By Noel Murray

B+

Fans of Sloan and New Pornographers should warm immediately to Zeus, a Toronto rock quartet featuring multiple singer-songwriters, each with a facility for grand-sounding songs and long-line melodies. Moonlighting from their gig as Jason Collett's backing band, Zeus' members use their debut LP *Say Us* to show off their chops and their musical interests, producing an eclectic set of songs unified mainly by brisk tempos, tinny piano, cooing harmonies, and guitars that shift easily from deep twang to dreamy slide. *Say Us* wears its influences openly—it's a blend of The Beatles, Harry Nilsson, E.L.O., Big Star, and Beach Boys—but jumbles them together cleverly, forging a sound that's busy and bright, like an amusement park for power-pop fans. At times, the influences fight each other too much, rendering the songs likeable but indistinct. But the mid-tempo ballad "I Know" (with its effortless guitar fillips and mournful brass hangings), the gospel-tinged "The River By The Garden" (which starts like a spare Johnny Cash song, then sounds a triumphant wail), and "Kindergarten" (with its Roy Orbison-esque slow-build and cautionary tone) are all the work of musicians who deserve to move from the side of the stage to the front.



torontoist

Sound Advice: *Say Us* by Zeus

Every Tuesday, *Torontoist* scours record store shelves in search of the city's most notable new releases and brings you the best—or sometimes just the biggest—of what we've heard in *Sound Advice*.

When Zeus released their *Sounds Like Zeus* EP as a teaser to their upcoming full-length, it was an immediate hit and maybe even a bit of a surprise to most who were used to them being just Jason Collett's backing band. Now that *Say Us* is out (on Arts&Crafts, of course), they've got a full classic-pop cache from which to build a brand all their own.

Riding a nostalgia soundwave can easily tread dangerous kitsch lines; Zeus are unmistakably a band looking to pay tribute to their influences, but they manage to stay far and clear from these trappings, the ones that the sappy sounds of Halifax's *Brent Randall* unfortunately fall into headfirst. Expanding the warmth and hooks that made the EP so loveable into sleeper, acoustic-laced Band jams ("River by the Garden") and psych-y freak outs ("You Gotta' Teller") provide some traction on the slick pop of carry-over songs "Marching Through Your Head" and "How Does It Feel." "Fever of the Time" (streaming above) revels in its layers of fuzzy textures and playful keys and harmonies. When the accentuated '70s riffs of "The Renegade" take the song into a stomping barre-chord transition and from there, a spirited modern indie-pop eruption, the skilled dynamics that make Zeus more refreshing than referential are crystal clear (and oh-so irresistible).

It's one thing to borrow sound textures from the Beatles and another entirely to cop a Sgt. Pepper aesthetic. Luckily, Zeus isn't just pilfering vintage stores in the hopes of creating something that isn't rightfully there. *Say Us* starts with a rough sketch of classic rock and completes it—Zeus style—with tons of their own decipherable personality and modern flair.



Zeus Sounds Like Zeus

REVIEWS > POP & ROCK > SEP 2009



By Vish Khanna

One of the sunniest additions to the Arts & Crafts roster, Zeus are clearly old school rock'n'roll fans but they exhibit their devotion refreshingly. One of the best live acts around, the Toronto, ON quartet have cut their teeth solo and as Jason Collett's backing band. Left to their own devices, they're clearly students of Brit rock masters and their theatrical, dynamic musical flourishes. "How Does it Feel" might just be a Kinks outtake, while "Marching Through Your Head" is a strong contender for pop song of the year. The band strike down upon this McCartney & Wings-style tune with earnest authority, and it's just catchy as all get-out, while an unlikely cover of Genesis's "That's All" finds the band infusing the song with guts it never had. As mighty as their namesake, Zeus are a band on the rise.
(Arts & Crafts)