

OK,

WITH A DANCEY NEW LP AND MORE WILD MUSIC VIDEOS TO COME, THE 15-YEAR-OLD BAND IS AS PLAYFUL AS EVER. BY DAN CRANE. PHOTOGRAPHED BY JARED THOMAS KOCKA

"Today I'm a little bit fucked up," confesses Damian Kulash backstage, prior to a free OK Go show on the Santa Monica Pier in Los Angeles. He isn't drunk. The singer is, however, bleary-eyed and visibly jet-lagged, having just flown in from Japan, where the four-piece group was busy wrapping their latest video for "I Won't Let You Down," a snappy, early-Michael Jackson-meets-Prince-style dance-inducing track. A music video shoot can be just a standard-issue, post-album inevitability for many bands, but for OK Go, it's an opportunity to reach and build fans.

In July 2006, YouTube was only a year and a half old, beginning to trade in workplace distractions and Internet ephemera, but not yet fully formed as the one-stop shop for video content that it is today. That same month, OK Go's music video "Here It Goes Again," from their second studio album, in which band members dance on treadmills (creating a mesmerizing, illusory image), was uploaded to the site, becoming instant click bait, receiving millions of views. Less than two months later, "Here It Goes Again" peaked at 38 on the

Billboard Hot 100. And that is the story of how OK Go became a landmark band in the Internet era. While it can be argued that their initial success was a case of right time, right place, fun video, OK Go's staying power is a result of their own creativity, musical talent, and self-awareness. Today, eight years after dropping their breakthrough video on YouTube, OK Go are celebrating their fourth studio album, *Hungry Ghosts*, and a new single, "The Writing's on the Wall," which has already racked up over 10 million views online in just a few months.

It's sometimes easy to forget that they're not some sort of genius music video production conglomerate. Fortunately, *Hungry Ghosts* is filled with perfect pop gems just as meticulously crafted as their videos. The



from left: andy
ross, damian
kulash, tim
nordwind,
dan konopka.

grooming: catherine
furniss at
celestine agency
using kevin murphy.

band—which formed in Chicago in 1998 but now calls L.A. home—took a slightly different approach to recording *Hungry Ghosts* than previous studio albums. Working once again with producer Dave Fridmann (Cut Copy, Flaming Lips, Tame Impala), the band set up a series of stations in the studio where each member could go fiddle and tweak different sections of a track. The result is a much more electronic—and in many ways, more danceable—album. “I feel like electronic sounds and beats and programming have matured,”

says Kulash. “People are writing what I think of as structured pop music as opposed to just dance loops.”

While the album is generally upbeat, there remains an undercurrent of melancholy throughout. Its title, in fact, refers to a Buddhist concept of a spirit born out of a traumatic experience that can never be placated or satisfied. “It’s a particularly relevant concept right now to our personal lives,” admits Kulash, somewhat enigmatically. “It’s sort of a fight between satisfaction and desire.”

Hungry Ghosts is the first original studio album that OK Go have released without any outside label involvement since forming their own label, Paracadute, in 2010. “The part that feels really different,” says Kulash, “is that there are no boundaries to the kinds of ideas we can consider.” That includes collaborating with Honda on the new “I Won’t Let You Down” video, and developing original apps, a TV show, and a video game. “Now we can have debates among people we want to be working with as opposed to fights with people who have ultimate control over us.”

Back when they were with EMI and Capitol, the labels weren’t always receptive to things that didn’t show a direct impact on their bottom line. “Ideas that don’t affect record sales and are more about us doing what we think is interesting, or what our fans think is interesting, keep the universe of the band alive, which is of value to us,” says Kulash. “It’s very hard to convince a label that something that can’t cause a bump in sales matters.”

Kulash is careful to point out, however, that he’s not anti-label, per se. “I always feel like when I say this kind of stuff I’m doing that ‘Labels are so fucked up’ kind of thing,” he says. “But it’s sort of systemic. It doesn’t have anything to do with them being smart or stupid or whatever. We have the freedom to have a fairly naive business plan, which is just, like, ‘I don’t know, sounds cool to me, let’s try it!’ It’s been going for 15 years and we have reason to believe it could keep going.”



GO!

LISTEN UP:



SHEPPARD
BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA
MEMBERS: Amy, George, and Emma Sheppard; Jay Bovino; Michael Butler; Dean Gordon

Perhaps all that Aussie sunshine is behind Sheppard’s perpetually cheerful combination of indie-pop melodies, dizzying synths, and bright, energetic vocals. Hailing from Brisbane on Australia’s east coast, the colorful six-piece includes siblings Amy, George, and Emma Sheppard, who grew up in Papua New Guinea before relocating to Oz and discovering their knack for knocking out catchy-as-sin pop songs. The trio recruited Sydney songwriter and guitarist Jay Bovino, drummer Dean Gordon, and second guitarist Michael Butler and inked a deal with Republic Records earlier this year.

LUCY BROOK
Play this: “Geronimo”

Photograph courtesy of Republic Records.



STREETLIGHT CADENCE
HONOLULU, HAWAII
MEMBERS: Jonathon Franklin, Brian Webb, Chaz Umamoto, Jesse Shiroma

Ever miss Mumford & Sons’ and The Lumineers’ earlier, acoustic-laden tunes? Well, have a listen to Streetlight Cadence, whose *After the War* EP will have you singing along with the windows down after just one spin. The violin-cello-guitar-accordion quartet got its start performing on the streets of Waikiki, and this past summer found them on an eventful tour of the East Coast, during which their van caught fire. Thankfully, all was OK. Our take? Once their first full-length album comes out, their van won’t be the only thing catching fire.

KARISSA MONTANIA
Play this: “Get Out”