



The Brothers' Grit

by Matthew W. Shearon

"You look at bands like Bloc Party," he

continues. "After their first album, they toured the shit out of their songs... then got right back into the studio... [that's] hope- less... it's homogenized culture, at least with British bands anyway." That homogeneity—the big market sound-alike mire—lights a fire under guys like White, who don't want to end up as another band of the minute, with or without the chart-soaring hits. ESP's third offering, *No Need to Be Downhearted*, was recorded by the brothers in fragments, starting with bedroom demos that were allowed to breathe—given proper time in the oven, leaving little chance for any tune to come out half-baked.

With an uncanny knack for adapting

the best elements of their favorite bands, Tom confesses his deep admiration for Mission of Burma, Robert Wyatt and icons The Beach Boys. Electric Soft Parade dedicated quite a bit of time in the album's production, time to reign in wandering melodies and stray synths. No one tied their hands up this time when it came to learning ProTools or fiddling with a few bars of a song for hours. The result appears to be another confident step forward and their first full-length to hit U.S. shelves.

No Need to Be Downhearted swarms with schizophrenic orchestration and sticky choruses on takes like "If That's The Case, Then I Don't Know" and "Cold World." And with a bobbing tempo round like "Misunderstanding," Tom attempts to bring a touch of mystery and sincerity to the pop song template ("Either you're pissed off that your girlfriend and sincerity to the pop song template sense of just that: a daydream that lingers for good reason, leaves a footprint of joy, a call to a bit of lightheaded revelry.

"If I didn't make music, I'd be making food. I'd be a chef," Tom White explains on the other end of the line in London, late into a gray afternoon still recovering from a final tour gig the previous night. The culinary classes will have to wait; he and his brother Alex, from Brighton, U.K., have several other day jobs.

Signed in their mid-teens by indie label dB, the siblings' first LP (*Holes in the Walls*, 2002) garnered them widespread acceptance in the U.K., a covered opening bill for Oasis and a Mercury Prize nomination. Their success revved up more with a BMG contract. So why don't you have an ESP poster on order for your dorm room wall? With major label money came major label marketing, image molding, a bit of glam... all of the bells, whistles and sizzling frustration. "We knew what we were getting into, so I don't hold anything against BMG," Tom sincerely reassures.

After the release of *The American Adventure* (2003) on BMG, the two parties shook hands and called it a done deal. Visions of sharpened knives, crudites and hollandaise, band-aided fingers and starting a cozy around-the-corner French bistro must have swirled in Tom's head. But he didn't go out and get a pair of comfy clogs and a cutting board—not just yet. "Man, we started [The Brakes]," he laughs. "That's what we do, man. [Alex] is in another band as well." The Brakes, fronted by British Sea Power's Eamon Hamilton, the brother White and Marc Beatty of The Tenderfoot, are a Brit indie pop big body diesel packing a lot of talent and ingenuity under the hood. (Their album, *The Beatific Visions*, will be released in May by Rough Trade under the name brakesbrakesbrakes in the U.S.) The touring and writing schedule demanded from their side projects gives them the needed "headspace outside of the [record industry] bubble." *The Human Body EP*, a testing toe in the waters of the U.S. market, reveals a grounded knowledge of sprawling pop balladry and polished riff rock. It also threw the covers off of an audience they didn't know existed, but hope to gain acceptance from. "It's almost like we have to come over to the U.S., then bring the response back the U.K. and say, 'Give us more record deals.'