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ALTERNATIVE PRESS

October, 2015



GREAT DANES

NEW POLITICS are Vikings without a home—which means they *have* to conquer America.

STORY: Dan Leroy ♦ PHOTOS: Max Schwartz

"I'll never be American, and I accept that," admits David Boyd. "Honesty is accepting the place that you're in."

This is more of an admission than you might think. The frontman of alt-rock trio New Politics *sounds* American: He speaks in perfect, unaccented English, giving away his Danish nationality only in the stray, unusual phrase (like "soup of can" instead of "can of soup"). He and his bandmate Søren Hansen have also *lived* American for the past five years, relocating from Copenhagen to Brooklyn when New Politics signed a major-label deal, and toughing out the difficult transition. And certainly, New Politics' love for American artists, from Nirvana (whom they sometimes cover live) to the Beastie Boys, is a well-established part of their big, playful sound.

Vikings, the title of New Politics' third album (and their first on new label Warner Bros.) comes from a joke Boyd and Hansen share about their Scandinavian heritage with their American-born drummer, Louis Vecchio. Still, the album is no laughing matter. The second single, the synth-rocking anthem "West End Kids," is a paean to the band's old hometown. "When I go back, unfortunately, I can only stay a couple of weeks, because I go out of my mind," Boyd acknowledges. "But that was one of our homes. We don't overthink things. We don't take things too

seriously." Yet the song has "become a bit of a nostalgic kind of thing." Caught between two cultures, "What are we, really?" he asks rhetorically. "We don't plan on going back, because there's such an emotional attachment here in America. I never thought about it until now... But I guess the idea of *Vikings* is us subconsciously holding on to what we have left of Denmark, of Scandinavia."

Speaking from his Brooklyn apartment, Boyd talked to Dan Leroy about *Vikings*, getting over culture shock and how to talk to American women, among other subjects.

When you made your second album, *A Bad Girl In Harlem*, you were coming off a debut that didn't do as well as expected. *Vikings* follows *Harlem*, which was a hit. Is there more pressure following up a success or a disappointment?

DAVID BOYD: It's hard to answer, because I have to look at what success *is*. Judging success probably takes a full career, a full journey. But looking back at it now, maybe I'm glad everything went the way it did.

The minute we got signed to RCA, we left Denmark. Just to put it in perspective, Denmark has five million people. We didn't even think about it. When we got signed,


there was all this hype, and people are excited for you. We got this idea that, "Oh my God, we made it! It's over!" And then it was kind of like a brick to the face—or whatever the expression is.

We just went on tour for, like, a year and a half in a van. And we ran out of money. We weren't getting paid. We were paying our roadies the minimum. We didn't even really experience America until *after* the tour. And then we started trying to write the second album, and nothing was coming. I realized, "Shit, I have to go out and meet girls and experience things or I'm not gonna have anything to write about!"

What was the lowest point of that whole period?

We were living in a box in Bushwick. Maybe 600 square feet. I just had a mattress, and we had our drums and all our gear there, because we couldn't afford storage space. Our studio was there, too. It was such a mess. I had broken up with my girlfriend in Copenhagen; we were in a long-distance relationship that didn't work out. Søren was already talking about going back to Denmark—it was something we discussed. And I was lying there, reflecting, thinking, "I absolutely have nothing. I have no idea what I'm doing." It was a... reality check.

L to R: Hansen, Boyd, Vecchio



But now, I don't think I'd change anything. We kind of *had* to go through that. And what were we gonna do, go back to Denmark and be losers, like all the others? [Laughs.] No offense.

So making *Vikings* was probably easier?

Yeah. Most of it was written on the back of the bus when we were on tour with Fall Out Boy and Paramore last year. We had so much free time: We just had to play a half-hour set, and then we could write. It was so much fun, like it was in the early days of the band. We're in a better place now, and I think this album reflects that. I mean, success is great revenge for anyone who's doubted you.

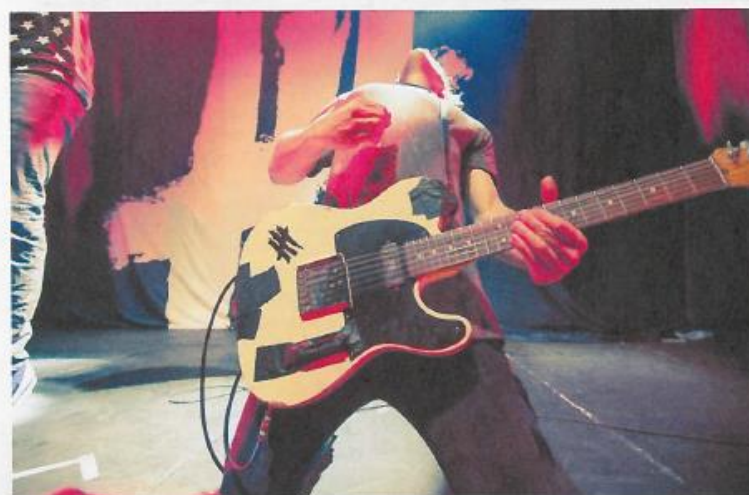
How much did it help your transition to America when you added a native—Louis—to the lineup back in 2010?

Louis is an easy guy to love. He's a people person. And this was always Louis' dream, to be in a band and signed to a major label. So when we were losing our fucking minds, he was being a happy, excited drummer! [Laughs.]

You've spoken in other interviews about one cultural difference in particular: talking to girls here in America versus back home. A song like "Girl Crush" on the new album—which starts with the line, "I still can't get over the sex we had"—suggests you've figured that out.

I'm not ashamed to say I've found love in all different places over the past few years. America's huge. [Laughs.] All of that—the ex-girlfriends and misunderstandings and everything else—kind of came into a package on this album. Look, I realize that being a musician and being foreign also gives you plus points. It does. And that goes for being an American musician in other countries, too. But here in America, you have to prove to a woman that you're worth her love and time. You have to put a little work into it. In Denmark, it's just the opposite. A woman is a figure of power. Females are dominant there. I'm not trying to say anything bad about the guys, but it's true. Over where I'm from, a woman lets you *know* if you have a chance with her.

I never used to approach girls in America. I just thought they didn't like me. I remember this one time, we were at a bar, and Louis says to me, "Are you gonna go talk to that girl?" And I'm like, "No, I'll just come off like a total desperate slut." [Laughs.]





“I have a gift in writing songs, in coming up with melodies. But I’m a horrible musician. But I’m also a firm believer that you don’t need to become perfect to start living your dreams.”

—DAVID BOYD

You guys worked with producer Jake Sinclair again on several tracks on *Vikings*. What is it about that relationship that seems to get results?

We actually call him “Results.” That’s his nickname! Because he’s able to take a demo and finish it. He even helps me with the lyrics. He’ll tell me, “David, you can’t say, ‘A mouth that is big.’” [Laughs.] We also got to work with Rich Costey; we did “West End Kids” with him. He had the sickest studio. Oh my God! It was like a playground. And he’s so good. So good. He’s worked with Muse, with some of the biggest names of our time. And we got to work with Tim Pagnotta on “50 Feet Tall.”

But Jake and us have a similar situation. He was Butch Walker’s chief engineer, and he was a young, up-and-coming producer, still hungry—similar to us in a lot of ways. We just kind of have this bond, because “Harlem” was such a big song. We just built a relationship. We’ll go out drinking, and he’ll make me start breakdancing in a bar. And he’ll talk about why I’m not doing it 24/7, and how, if he could breakdance, that’s all he’d be doing. [Laughs.]

You actually started as a dancer, instead of a musician, and fans have come to expect some new moves from you at live shows. Anything you’re working on for your fall headlining tour?

That is something that we’ve done from the beginning, and it’s become a big part of the band, as well. It’s part of being an entertainer. I’m sure in the Sixties if breakdancing would have been around, Mick Jagger would have done it, as well. Elvis would have done it. I’m just practicing every day. I’m practicing everything. I think it’s your duty to become good, to get better and better.

I admit sometimes I struggle with feeling guilty. Because I have a gift in writing songs, in coming up with melodies. But I’m a horrible musician. But I’m also a firm believer that you don’t need to become perfect to start living your dreams. So maybe two albums after *Vikings*... maybe I’ll have the guts to go onstage with a bass or a guitar. [Laughs.] alt

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GRAHAM FIELDER