

# VANT

**VANT** aren't just a band, they're a war cry. A statement, a revolt, the new generation's charge to the socio-political barricades. As much as their music demands moshpit bedlam, their lyrics demand discussion, on Syria, environmentalism, sexual assault, inequality, racism, religion, social media isolation, and the all-out self-destruction of mankind. Make no mistake, Vant vent.

"Every time we play a show it's a form of activism, a form of protest," says singer and centrepiece **Mattie Vant**. "I wanted to do something that means something, that could have a positive impact. For me, rock music has always gone hand in hand with making a stand, being at the forefront of a movement and trying to change the world."

Mattie well knows that if you want things to happen, you have to make them. Born in the North-East town of Seaham, he was dismissed by teachers as lacking the musical talent to learn guitar at the age of seven. At the age of thirteen, he resorted to begging his parents for a cheap Argos electric and strong-armed a local community band project into his songs, which were inspired by The Strokes, Arctic Monkeys, QOTSA and an intense love of The Vines.

Having followed his mates in Tigercub and Demob Happy to Brighton, he moved to London in 2012 and took a job in the bar at Birthdays in Dalston just as the club became the new cult hangout. It was a pivotal year for Vant. A stint of depression in Brighton had landed Mattie in a musical rut, struggling to put together insular, self-obsessed songs. "I realised it was self-indulgent and pointless, I wasn't getting any satisfaction from it," he says. "So I started writing from within again. I just wrote what came out."

What poured out over the next three months were around 30 dazzling punk rock songs wracked with political discontent, trying to make sense of a disintegrating world. "I had this mission statement and this drive to write things that needed to be talked about but weren't," Mattie explains. "I was really into the idea of political music – Neil Young, The Clash, and I loved what Rage Against The Machine stood for. I honestly thought that was how I could make a difference."

Mattie had found his calling and **VANT** was born, bawling about the injustice, hypocrisy and self-destructive idiocy of humanity. Concerns that had been festering since he'd watched Zeitgeist in his hallucinogenic teens and started searching for clarity and meaning in our post-God age.

"I wanted to set out core principles from the start," he says. "We need a better education system worldwide. Despite the leaps forward in equality, there's still a long way to go for race and gender equality. And the final thing is we're really fucking up the environment. They're obvious things but they're so overlooked. The whole point of doing something as a band was physically getting out and starting a conversation on a person-to-person level, rather than it just existing on this platform that's entwined with algorithms that mean that only people who share my opinion will ever see anything, and you can't challenge the other person's opinion because they're only seeing what they believe."

**VANT** cohered surprising quickly, under its own creative and ideological gravity. Bassist **Billy Morris** was Birthdays' mohawked pot washer with whom Mattie had bonded over the bar's musical playlist; another bar worker played in a band with a "more theoretical, practical" guitarist called **Henry Eastham**. Billy's boss pulled in a favour with ex-Clor drummer Harry Bennett to help Mattie record his first five songs late in 2013, but when it came to playing live, Mattie convinced his Swedish friend Martin Söderin to move to London to join. United by a shared vision and mutual values, **VANT** played a handful of shows during 2014, before a broken leg confined Mattie to the studio, recording seven more songs in five days at Willesden's Fish Factory studio.

His injury also forced him to make a 2015 New Year resolution to change his life. "I was bored and killing myself slowly," he admits, "a borderline alcoholic working in a bar." Right on cue, a call from his manager one Friday night in early January. The video for '**Parasite**', an eighty-three-second blues-mocking firestorm about nematodes (a parasitic worm so common that "if you stripped away all matter on earth apart from nematodes, you'd still be able to see mountains and trees and the skeletal ghosts of human beings, it'd be this weird ghost-like world") had come to the attention of Parlophone Records. By Monday morning virtually every label in the country was on the phone, but **VANT** felt Parlophone best understood their plan to "make a statement and do something important."

**VANT** slowly inched their vision into the public eye. '**Parasite**' made for a tongue-scorching taster on their own Dumb Blood label in April, alongside its autobiographical new wave garage AA-side '**Do You Know Me?**', a catalogue of

Mattie's soul-crushing jobs in telesales and bartending. It wasn't until their second AA-single '**Parking Lot/The Answer**' in September that their harder hitting blows began to land.

The deceptively upbeat Americana of '**Parking Lot**' disguises a dissection of sexual boundaries and the rape culture of the US college system. "The point of the song is that when you're younger you don't realise sometimes when you're overstepping the boundary. Because of our particularly terrible sex education system in western culture, we never teach people about emotions or respect for the other person." '**The Answer**', meanwhile, was Mattie's brooding, forthright reaction to the chemical attacks and Western invasion of Syria. "Although I'm in complete disagreement with the way this world's run," Mattie explains, "the banks controlling everything and the pointlessness of governments, I equally appreciate that if you put yourself in that position of power and you're asked 'do we or do we not invade this country?' then it's an impossible situation to be a part of. The whole point of that song was to put myself in the mind of a political leader searching for that answer. It remains relevant because no-one knows what the fuck is happening with that conflict or how to tackle it."

Replacing drummer Martin with **David 'Greenie' Green** over the course of a hectic summer of festival shows, tours with the likes of Royal Blood and The Big Moon and further recording, **VANT** upped their game by 2016. February's release of the sassy, ramalama '**Fly-By Alien**', featuring a middle-eight written in a naked animalistic frenzy inspired by Lucien Freud, had him imagining himself as an extra-terrestrial observer deciding "that species is a waste of space... can I zap my laser?" - "we're probably going to be the first race in history that's actively sought its own extinction," Mattie explains.

Then the summer's '**Karma Seeker**' cued up the debut album '**DUMB BLOOD**', an opinionated garage pop firecracker that chews up a vast array of contemporary issues and spits them melodically in your face. '**Peace & Love**' bewails inequality and the off-hand dismissal of the sixties counterculture ideals in the Brexit age: "Brexit for me is a massive step in the wrong direction. The only hope we have as a species is more unification worldwide. The words 'peace and love' became fashion statements... they're essentially meaningless. How do you turn that into a movement now?"

'**Lampoon**'s chorus cry of "everything is dumb with this generation" acts as the album's de facto title track, challenging the way that social media mob rule mutes our increasingly clued-up youth. "It's a comment on the silent generation," Mattie says. "I see our youth as a waking giant because they're better educated about the world and they have a better worldview than I ever did in my teens. On social media you can no longer sit on the fence, you have to have an opinion on something, and no matter what opinion you form, you'll then be criticised for that opinion by the other side. So our voice has been stunted."

Elsewhere, '**I Don't Believe In God**' is Mattie's atheist anthem revelling in mortality, while the likes of '**Headed For The Sun**' and the album's summary song '**Time And Money**' call time on the human race. "There's a lot of hope within humanity," Mattie muses, "but unless there's some drastic changes made within the next hundred years I can't see our grandchildren having grandchildren. There's an elite that rules the planet and is dictated by finance and a lot of conflicts are really just money games, ways of making more profit. It feels like there's nothing you can do about it, we just entertain ourselves, trying to take as much enjoyment as we can from our time on earth without thinking about the legacy we're leaving."

If there's to be any hope, Mattie knows we have to make it. That's why he's leading the new alt-rock charge to stand up, start conversations, change minds, make a difference. And he's already seeing the silent generation opening up to **VANT**. "You can't hit someone over the head and say 'you've gotta do this' because they'll instantly rebel," he says, "but if you go 'that's what I believe, these are my principles and the way I see the world, take what you will from it' people might then form their own opinions. We've already started to have an impact because there's a lot of kids that feel it's acceptable to talk about some of the things we sing about. You can't scroll through your Facebook or Twitter feed without stumbling on articles that have relevance and importance, so kids are way more switched on, but it only exists online. It's important to get people to have conversations with their family or at school or going to protests and becoming involved with it again."

"I'm not doing this to make money or personal gain," he concludes. "I want to make an impact. We're laying down the gauntlet."

Now pick it up and run. You know the war cry.

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