

# HOCKEY

## Mind Chaos

“Look out! I’ve got too much soul for the world!” growls Hockey singer Ben Grubin on opening track “Too Fake” channeling the swagger of a raspy Rod Stewart. And judging by the spring-loaded bass line and buoyant drum keeping up behind him, this is the sort of hit song that comes around only once in an iPod’s life cycle: it’s the perfect meeting point between downtown New York and the seedy streets of London.

But before you judge the direction of the Portland quartet’s debut based on the gate-crashing first single, check out the curveball that is “3 AM Spanish,” a funky composition with a spirit committed to both the fluidity of rap and the angstiness of *Combat Rock*-influenced punk. In fact, Grubin’s experience as an amateur MC way back in high school, as he reveals, comes in handy intermittently throughout *Mind Chaos* such as in the bridge to the howling “Curse This City,” (which, jarringly, also ends with a soulful and paradoxical commitment to “love this city”) and also during the verse of the spitfired Dylanisms of “Preacher.”

“As a kid, I listened to MC Hammer and C + C Music Factory, then some Wu Tang Clan,” Ben blushes. The influence is still felt. Obviously.

“Song Away,” however, could be Hockey’s mission statement with winning determination written all over it by way of Ben’s admitting that the promise of tomorrow is just a hit song away. “Now I want to write a truthful song over an 80’s groove,” he croons. “This is success music.” And based on the reaction he’s gotten thus far, he’s absolutely accurate.

Even months before the official release of Hockey’s *Mind Chaos*, Grubin along with bassist Jeremy “Jerm” Reynolds, guitarist Brian White and drummer Anthony Stassi have been inspiring crowds to dance despite the trend not to. The acclaimed four-night New York residency at Brooklyn’s Union Hall, and at Manhattan’s Santo’s Party House, Mercury Lounge and Piano’s respectively proved that the foursome can win over converts by the roomful. Their sweat-inducing performances even prompted *Time Out New York* to write, “Hockey is a new signee that plays unbelievably unself-conscious, balls-out pop-rock. Just try to resist the chorus of its song “Too Fake.” You can’t. See them now while they’re still playing small rooms.”

But this is not merely a stateside phenomenon--the impact has even been felt overseas. As the band toured the United Kingdom, *the Guardian* declared, “Witty, literate songs you can dance to,” it continues, “And they do effect a collision of opposites that is quite unprecedented.” Anthem Magazine followed suit with the hosannas categorizing Hockey as an almost unprecedented “[fusion between] arty cool dance and shameless pop.”

Ironically, while Hockey's hot rocks are catching on in all the right high-societal metropolitan places, the music itself was actually crafted far, far away from it all.

"New York City *has* had an influence on us," the singer asserts. "A lot of my production influences do come from New York. But lyrically," he amends, "The place was Spokane."

Yes, *that* Spokane. The idyllic Northwestern town in Washington State, which is primarily known for being the suburb not too far from Portland, Oregon. After having met at the University of Redlands, Grubin and Reynolds, both close to graduating, started Hockey as a duo only to soon thereafter move to Spokane to seek out the missing pieces. Hence, the recruitment of Stassi and White, two experienced musicians who could actualize the fullness of Grubin's vision.

"I always stayed a complete outsider [there] and I knew people who thought I was insane or strange," the vocalist admits about Spokane, "And I actually became unsure as to who was right. I got really into the concept of experimenting [then], as in life as an experiment."

Or as Jerm adds, "Spokane was very liberating because we felt free and secure to really stretch out creatively."

As time progressed and the group began realizing their potential, Hockey collectively moved to Portland, Oregon where there was more of active rock scene. "When we were working on the songs," Grubin recalls the time when he produced their songs in a Portland basement, "My priority was to [create] stuff that is worthwhile to people. As in completely original in some way. Making something that has never existed before and won't again, not in that it's better than other stuff, but like one small light of a new perspective. As in worthy of being a gift to a stranger."

And aside from seeking out and succeeding in discovering total innovation, another theme that perpetuates throughout the album is, as Grubin coins it, "total confrontation." "William Burroughs uses the phrase somewhere. It's the opposite of sentimentality, which leaves everything out that is complicated. I'm not there all way yet and because of that, sometimes, I'll tell lies or exaggerate in my lyrics."

Irregardless of the rock and roll truths, the fact remains that Hockey has come a long way since their dingy practice space in Spokane, or the small venues in Portland as a supporting act, or even, as the incarnation in college that once performed as a duo with a drum machine and a hi-jacked campus piano. Ben, Jerm, Anthony, and Brian are poised to infuse the world over with their *Mind Chaos* and it's the daunting largeness of potential world domination that has the band most excited. "It sort of has an all or nothing feel to it," Grubin says, "[And] I like the idea of a big gamble."