

AROUND TOWN

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Face The Music



When Rob Harvey dances, arms and head flailing around spasmodically, it brings to mind Ian Curtis of Joy Division who, like Harvey, rocketed to stardom while still in his teens.

Harvey has been compared to countless other musicians, most frequently Perry Farrell of Jane's Addiction. He laughs at this and says that until he was told that, he had never heard of Jane's Addiction. In truth, he's hard to pin down. There is a sincerity and simplicity in his lyrics, and his voice is unique.

His band The Music is back in full force touring with a new album, *Strength in Numbers*. They depart Japan this weekend and arrive in Taipei for the first time to rock Y17 on Sunday with their blend of Brit-pop, rock, blues-metal, electro and dance.

The Music began when band members Harvey (vocals), Phil Jordan (drums), Adam Nutter (guitar) and Stuart Coleman (bass), who met in high school in Leeds, England, were only 18 or 19 years old. They became darlings of the British press, riding high on the wave of Brit-pop. By 2002 their debut album, *The Music*, had reached No. 4 on the UK album charts.



Stuart Coleman.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MUSIC

They toured extensively throughout 2002 and 2003 in the UK, Australia, New Zealand and Japan, played at Glastonbury and then toured the US with Coldplay. In 2004 they released their second album, *Welcome to the North*, then went on a long hiatus during which Harvey, who was struggling with depression, contemplated quitting. Then in 2007 the band, which had been dropped by its old label, Virgin, signed with Polydor and recorded its latest album.

Harvey has been very candid about needing to take a break after the second album

and speaks openly about his struggle with drug and alcohol addiction and the depression that plagued him.

In a telephone interview last week, Harvey talked about the pressure of touring in the US and the sense of disconnection he had felt there: "I had abused myself. I'm very aware of what I do, almost to the point of obsession. The size of the universe, how powerless we can be — especially in a place like America — there's not a lot happening. People feed their needs and wants: food, drink, shopping, drink, drugs addictions. I kind of lost hope in the world being in America. It's supposed to be the number one country in the world — it's not."

After the second album was released, "we needed time to think about who we were as people," he said. "Basically I needed a reality check about what was going on in my head. I didn't want to get sucked up with living, I wanted to understand."

He is now 25 years old, and said he hasn't touched any substances including alcohol for more than three years. He speaks with a strong, deep Yorkshire accent, but his voice is youthful, full of hope and carries a genuine warmth.

The new album, *Strength in Numbers*, is darker than their earlier music, but is also more polished, with a strong electro edge that makes it extremely danceable. The newest single *Drugs* starts off sounding Blondie-esque, with Harvey's vocals evoking Depeche Mode at first, though Peter Dinklage comes to mind later in the song.

When the band started, the lyrics were "about dreams, and things that sounded a million miles away. [We are from a] small town, all we had was TV, newspapers and Internet," said Harvey. "We used to start up by just setting up and playing, but



Phil Jordan.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MUSIC

They took the UK by storm when they were barely in their 20s, then nearly fell apart because they couldn't handle the success. Now Leeds four-piece The Music is back, and the band makes its Taipei debut on Sunday

BY ALITA RICKARDS
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER



Rob Harvey.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MUSIC

something has changed psychologically. Me straightening up changed all that."

Now they start with "an acoustic or drum beat or sequence then a vocal. Once we have something exciting [we] take it somewhere more melodic and start focusing on lyrics." Going around the world "has made things feel more possible. Music is about expressing ourselves. Once we realized that, we wanted to empower people, help them realize that what they do with their lives is important."

He warmed up to the topic, the words tumbling over themselves as he explained what is obviously an important idea to him: "If you look at things a certain way, we do all appear small — but the small decisions are vital and can change living ..." He took a deep breath and sighed. "I can see things are

evolving but it gets me down that we live in this democracy and we could be doing so much. I use music to get across what I need to get out."

Harvey is not worried about the language barrier when touring in Asia. "Look at Curt Cobain — I rarely know what he sings but I understand what he is saying, I feel his pain. Music is beyond words. It's about a feeling, an energy, [it's a] sonic language, noises sparking emotions." He likes to "nick melodies off of birds singing" and said that weirdness is a virtue: "People's brains won't change if we continue to do the same things — things that are weird or different is how we evolved from the apes."

"I'm a very expressive person" he said, "I need to be, or I go inside and get self-destructive."

Yoga, running, exercise, and playing football keep his energy and spirits high: "Outside of music there is a life — family, girlfriends, home, those things are vital," he said.

In the short term, he would like to meet a girl and travel a bit: "I made a vow to myself that I've got to go and see as much of this planet as I can and soak it up and take it in. Travel makes you meet people who potentially change your life."

He wants to connect with the audience through music, and allow that to transport them: "Every time I get on stage I want to be able to relax and feel welcome, I don't



Adam Nutter.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MUSIC

want a separation between the band and the audience — I want us all to feel a freedom from worries — people don't go on stage as themselves, I'm not bothered about looking cool, I want to give people power."

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: The Music, with supporting acts White Eyes (白目) and DJ Mykal (林哲儀)

WHERE: Y17 Youth Activity Center (青少年育樂中心), 10F, 17, Renai Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市仁愛路一段17號), tel: (02) 2342-2388

WHEN: Sunday from 6:30pm to 8pm. Doors open at 6pm

TICKETS: NT\$1,500 at the door or NT\$1,400 if purchased today. Advance tickets available online through tickets.books.com.tw or at the following venues: **Roxy Jr Cafe**, 1, Ln 80, Shida Rd, Taipei City (台北市師大路80巷1號), tel: (02) 2366-1799; **The Tavern**, 415, Xinyi Rd Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市信義路四段415號), tel: (02) 8789 0892; **Underworld** (地下社會), B1, 45 Shida Rd, Taipei City (台北市師大路45號B1), tel: (02) 2369-0103; **Paulina**, 167, Anhe Rd Sec 2, Taipei City (台北市安和路二段167號), tel: (02) 2378-5678; **MolRelax cafe**, 20, Ln 60, Taishun St, Taipei City (台北市泰順街60巷20號), tel: (02) 2367-7714; **Kafka on the Beach**, 2F, 2, Ln 244, Roosevelt Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市羅斯福路三段244巷2號2樓), tel: (02) 2364-1996; **Norwegian Wood** (挪威森林咖啡館), Ln 284, 9, Roosevelt Rd, Sec 3 Taipei City (台北市羅斯福路三段284弄9號); and **Fucking Place** (操場), 2F, 169, Heping E Rd Sec 2, Taipei City

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