



88 groovy ways to hit the musical top

LA pop-rock quartet The 88 are still unsigned, but that's not stopping them from gaining exposure on their own

The 88

With Matt Costa
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The Powerplant

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The retro revolution is in full swing, but unsigned LA-based rock group The 88 can't be accused of milking the genre just because it's becoming more and more popular. They've been making neo-oldies music for over a decade, and rather than being motivated by the prosperous musician's lifestyle that stems from following a particular music trend, The 88 are finding that their love for tunes truly has been their key to success.

"A long time ago, we went through the phase of drinking and drugs and things like that, and actually, it ended up hurting us," says The 88's keyboardist Adam Merrin. "We broke up for a year. It was a really dark time, so it was great to be able to come out of that and begin playing music again, and now be able to do it very clear-headed, with the ability to remain focused and

to stay away from all that.

"I got into drugs by reading Beatles books," Merrin continues. "I mean, they glorified [drug use] and I knew about how they'd take LSD and then record. So, I was always curious about it, and I looked up to them so much. They were my favourite band. I wanted to live that lifestyle, and I started getting into other '60s bands, and, as you know, drugs were just a part of the way they lived. As a kid aged 14 or 15, I looked up to it and really wanted to live like that."

Since cleaning up their act midway through their career, The 88 have undertaken successful venture after successful venture. Their self-produced CD sampler made it into the hands of Josh Schwartz, creator of *The OC*, and thanks to the appearance of one of their songs on the show's soundtrack, the band has been in high demand by other prime-time dramas, as well as by fans who are flocking to see their energy-laden performances. The sharp, pinstripe-wearing quartet—consisting of Merrin, Keith Slettedahl (vocals, guitar), Todd O'Keefe (bass) and Anthony Zimmitti

(drums)—is apparently a welcome change from other '60s-clad bands that spend their time being cooler than their fan base.

"We're really not much of a message-oriented band," Merrin explains. "For us, it's more about having a good time. I mean, our shows are really fun and lively, and people love to just sing and dance when we play. We're just really about having a good time and meeting our fans. We're very approachable, and we love talking with people after a gig."

This band-next-door mentality seems to be working for this foursome that denies that art and pop songs can't work together. While their music is catchy, Merrin remains convinced that the esoteric side of The 88's music isn't to be missed by their listeners, or, ironically by The 88's future selves.

"The funny thing about our music is you can go back to your lyrics after a certain amount of time and it will have meaning," Merrin says. "I think it's just like a stream of consciousness,

and when we go back and listen to what we wrote, we might think to ourselves, 'Oh yeah, I was talking about this at this point in my life.' So our songs do have a meaning; it's just at the time we write a song, we don't realize it."

After over a decade of self-promotion and personal battles, it seems like The 88 are poising themselves for a success that's both artistically valid and drug-free—a kind of success the masses, and their moms, can truly appreciate.

THE 88 SPILL THEIR SECRETS

It's obvious that The 88's success has been hard-won, especially since the band is still without a label. With over a decade of music making under his belt, Adam Merrin knows the know-how on giving budding musicians advice on getting their name out to the people who matter. Here are some tips:

"There's enough room for everyone out there who wants to make a living

playing music. One of the best things we ever did with the band was make CD samplers of a couple songs off our first record, and pass them out all around town. It worked. We noticed there was more and more attendance at our shows."

"We'd also go to venues where bands were playing and where we thought the fans would also like our music—like

Supergrass, the Foo Fighters, Rooney and Modest Mouse. And, at all these local shows, we'd go and pass out CD samplers. People would go home and listen to it, or listen to it in their car with their friends, and it really worked. Plus, you meet a lot of people that way, people in the industry too."

"The Internet is good, too; Myspace is a great way of getting your name out there."

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