

# From the ocean depths to the pop-punk shoreline

After a frustrating wait, Vancouver quartet Marianas Trench are gearing up to bring their debut album, *Fix Me*, to the front lines

## Marianas Trench

With Faber  
Wednesday, 28 March at 7pm  
The Powerplant

CARLA KAVINTA  
Arts & Entertainment Writer

For most, the early 20s are years of self-discovery, inward exploration and time-consuming self-doubt. These are the years in which we probe deeper into the trappings of our existential crises and begin to ask larger-than-life questions, particularly related to what we're supposed to do for the rest of our lives.

A notable exception, however, is lead vocalist/guitarist Josh Ramsay of Marianas Trench. The Vancouver native claims to have known that music was the "only thing he wanted to do" from the mere age of four. He remembers his first legitimate composition and recording at only eight years old.

"Man, if you think my singing voice is high now, you should've heard that shit before it changed," Ramsay jokes.

The quartet, whose flair for pop separates them from other hard-rock bands, hones their craft with catchy melodies and electrifying guitar riffs in a sound which Ramsay describes as pop-punk.

"If Blink 182 had crazy inappropriate sex with a band like the Beach

Boys or Queen, we're what would get shot out," he says.

Understandably, such a marketable sound mixed with Ramsay's extensive musical background and an impressive support system (his father owned Little Mountain Sound, a label which recorded Aerosmith and Bon Jovi; his mother toured with Leonard Cohen), would lead anyone to believe that the band's ride to success in the music industry was a smooth one. On the contrary, the West Coast foursome has faced many struggles to be where they are today.

"You have to go through a lot of 'hurry up then wait' processes," Ramsay explains. "We were trying for two or three years before we put out an album. That period of time was difficult for me because a lot of people would say, 'You guys are ready, we just need one more song.'"

On a creative level, Ramsay's biggest challenge has been trying to keep things simple in terms of songwriting and arranging. Coming from a musical family, he admits that his broad range of influences coupled with knowledge of theory and more complicated music than pop has made it difficult to separate his musical ideas.

"I remember Chad Kroeger [Marianas Trench is signed under the Nickelback frontman's record label, 604 Records] was like, 'Dude, you're a good writer and everything, but you really gotta learn to just let one



song be one song. Stop cramming too many ideas into one fucking song, man.' It wasn't that I was consciously trying to make complicated music. It just came out of me."

Despite this difficulty, Ramsay has managed to preserve his positive attitude, taking constructive criticism to heart and continuing to work hard at what he loves.

"I think we've used that nervous

energy to drive us to do better," Ramsay says. "I've learned so much about songwriting and what works and what doesn't work as a result of doing the first album that I think the second one is going to be so much better. I'm excited to get started on it."

The success of their debut album, *Fix Me*, lifted Marianas Trench out of obscurity, leaving them liberated, inspired and inclined to deliver

outstanding performances for their ever-growing fan base. Even so, Ramsay still thinks a little more exposure wouldn't hurt.

"I'm focused on making sure that we have a kick ass tour and that we can live up to the expectations of a headlining band, which I know we can be," Ramsay asserts. "I'm just focused on making everybody else a believer."



## The Good, The Bad & The Queen

*The Good, The Bad & The Queen*  
EMI/Parlophone  
www.thegoodthebadandthequeen.com

PAUL BLINOV  
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Ah, Damon Albarn: who can't you call up and make music with? The man behind Blur and the Gorillaz has a new hand-picked band, including Paul Simonon—the bassist from legendary UK punks The Clash—and Danger Mouse (from Gnarlz Barkley) on production.

Between the three of them, they've had more hits in their collective past than most successful bands could ever match. So can The Good, The Bad and The Queen one-up it's individual members impressive careers?

No. Not in a chart-climbing sense, anyways, as the music presented on their self-titled album is surprisingly out of left field. It's also surprisingly good, because Albarn and Co aren't trying to just recreate their past successes. Instead, they've crafted a fresh spread of tunes that sound like nothing any of them have done before.

A tinkling '50s piano drives "'80s Life," "Herculean" sounds urgent without sounding desperate and seven-minute closer, "The Good, The Bad and The Queen" rounds out the album with a wicked kickdown that many a younger rock band would kill to have written.

This could be the aging Albarn and already-aged Simonon's last stab at music, but *The Good, The Bad & The Queen* isn't the sound of burnt-out rock stars trying to make a few more dollars before retirement. These are the sounds of gifted musicians showing their younger contemporaries how to go out with a bang.



## The Two Koreas

*Altruists*  
Unfamiliar Records  
www.myspace.com/thetwokoreas

KRISTINA DE GUZMAN  
Arts & Entertainment Staff

At first, it seems that there's nothing really special about Stuart Berman's voice, which sounds typically punk. However, the catchy instrumentals more than make up for the presumed mediocrity of his vocal work in The Two Koreas' *Altruists*. The record begins with "Cheeky Snaps," a tune

that sounds like a musical experiment but somehow manages to become the kind of song you can't help bobbing your head to. Even when the instrumentals are driven to simplicity, like on the three-chord-centred "Exile on Mein Strasse," the results still manage to impress. "Cloth Coat Revolution" is a rant of sorts about society's superficiality when it comes to fashion, complete with tambourines, a choir, and drum beats that sound like firing gunshots.

Upon further listening, Berman's voice doesn't seem so average anymore. In "Play the Song, Christopher," you'll discover that he actually has some vocal range that wasn't shown in his singing. In "The Helicopter Skies"—a cross between the Silversun Pickups' "Lazy Eye" and the Ramones' "I Wanna Be Sedated"—Berman is accompanied by guitarist Kieran Grant to produce vocal work that is similar to the low and monotony-bordering register of Interpol's Paul Banks.

That isn't to say that The Two Koreas is a copycat band—they're far from it. This is a band that pays tribute to past genres, gives credit to the new ones and ties everything together to create a unique thread of music that it can call its own.

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