

Q & A with Ruban Nielson of Unknown Mortal Orchestra

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Following their near-legendary 2013 gig at the W.O.W. Hall, Unknown Mortal Orchestra is back for more. Portland's favorite psych-pop power trio will return to the W.O.W. this Thursday to promote their new record, *Multi-Love*. Prior to the band's arrival in Eugene, singer-guitarist Ruban Nielson sat with the Emerald to discuss what fans can expect from the band's next show and new material.

What can fans expect from your upcoming show? What will be different from your last show in Eugene?

We have a lot of new material and a new band member, Quincy, on keys. We try to make every single show unique and change things and improvise. We extend songs and freak out a lot. There are solos and all that good stuff. We play like bands used to back when you had to be good at your instruments, (laughs). It's been a while since our last W.O.W. Hall show, so I'm sure it'll be quite different and better. A lot of shows played since then.

I saw you in 2013 at the W.O.W. Hall and most of the positive feedback I heard from people afterward had to do with your technical prowess. How important do you believe technical ability is in rock?

It's not important at all in the strictest sense, but it also doesn't get in the way. You have to be pretty dumb to let skills ruin your music. I used to only know three chords and now I can play complex things, but I seem to have always been a musician people wanted to go and watch for some reason. It's not about impressing people. It's about playing something with some weird truth in it.

You worked on this record with your dad. How easy to work with is your dad in the studio?

Dad came to visit, and I was showing him what I was working on and wanted him to play on it. It was kinda cool working with him. He's still a professional musician now, and I grew up around a lot of jazz and stuff like that. I think this album is the first thing I've done that actually impressed him, (laughs). Actually, a really cool thing is I found my dad to be kind of uptight and hard on himself when recording. I found it cool to be like, 'Dad, your playing is awesome, you just need to relax a bit so that a good emotion makes it on the record rather than the vibe of someone trying to sound super good.'

You've said you're trying to get away from the "idea of manly white-guy rock music." What is your relationship with rock music at this time?

I mean, this week I spent building three different octave fuzz pedals to try and get the perfect Jimi Hendrix Foxy Lady-guitar sound, so I think me and rock are pretty tight. I just thought it was a boring idea to feed into the most typical idea of what a male with a guitar represents. I don't just get up on stage and do a bunch of random shit. I think a little more deeply than that. I don't want to alienate people of color and LGBT people and women by being just another boy in the boy's club of rock. That's incredibly boring to me. Wait, I know what you're thinking: 'But Ruban you rock so damn hard!' Well yes, this is true and life is weird.

You played on Toro Y Moi's new record *What For?* What is the experience of working on someone else's record like compared to your own?

I'm getting better at working around other people. I used to prefer to be by myself while I worked, but I've been trying to get better at collaboration. When I'm by myself I have a weird kind of logic to the way I work. I might start by reading something and then that will lead to watching an interview with someone in the book I'm reading and then that will make me want to modify a piece of equipment and then that will finally lead to recording something. Of course it's hard to work like that with other people, but I'm learning when you're collaborating you'll talk through subjects and watch YouTube videos and stuff too. It can be similar but it's just more social, you joke around, discuss current events get drunk or smoke something and then plug a keyboard in and do some work. So I'm getting better at that. And I used to kind of meditate and wait for inspiration to arrive, but nowadays, I'm getting good at forcing myself into the zone on demand. I don't always have five hours to wait. I might have to catch a train in forty minutes or whatever, so I'm getting better at going into the state of mind where good ideas happen.

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