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THE RUBY SUNS

Interview

by Max Noakes

Max Noakes gets yapping with **Ryan McPhun** of **THE RUBY SUNS** about performing at festivals and trends in world music.

So what's been happening with you guys anyway?

Um...we actually just came back from Australia, we played a couple of club shows and then a festival, just outside of Melbourne called Meredith and now we're back in Auckland and trying to get sorted. We haven't been here pretty much all year. So we have to get flats and kind of settle for a while. So we've been away from New Zealand since the end of February, we've been touring pretty much most of that time.

So tell me a bit about how you started out as a musician...

Well...I started playing music when I was twelve and yeah just went through various phases. When I went through high school I got more and more into it and when I was seventeen I started recording my own music. And yeah...it just kind of went from there. Eventually I moved to New Zealand and got a little more serious about it and started playing in bands.

So were you playing guitar back then?

Aw...guitar and drums, just whatever really. I started playing guitar and drums at the same time. I could sort of do both.

And when you're with The Ruby Suns what are you playing?

Well I played guitar in the band for a really long time but for the past year I've been playing drums and guitar. Now we've gotten rid of the guitar so I just play the drums and stuff like that. I'm kind of standing up and singing and playing drums.

I was kind of interested because you guys tend to use a lot of world music

elements in some of your tunes. Why do you think world music has become so popular as of late?

I don't know if there's any more reason other than that it's just some sort of fad. You know I'm sure Vampire Weekend has a lot to do with it. Well...I guess they sound more like Graceland-era Paul Simon but they're a really accessible popular band, so I'm sure they had a big part in it. But other than that I have no idea.

I dunno, I think popularity of music doesn't really have anything to do with much other than just a natural shift of anything you know. People are going to shift from right to left wing no matter what really, just because the citizens want change even if it's to the detriment of themselves.

Okay...well I thought in some ways it would be a kind of natural musical shift I guess. With music you have a lot of genre blending. Maybe it's just a way of mixing things up and expanding on traditional song structures and that kind of thing.

Yeah.

And you moved from the States to New Zealand?

Yeah.

Do you think the place you live or the places you've lived in before have affected the way you make music or even your taste in music?

Well that's a good question, but it's hard to answer because I don't know. I don't know how directly it affects my music but I think the people that I've met have sort of influenced what I like. Just hanging out with friends.

So I think it's just a big mish-mash really. I'm definitely more influenced by friends or bands that I like than the place that I'm living. But still, in saying that, sometimes a song will be totally influence by one particular thing. Like one song I've written was just about a tree in New Zealand, and that wouldn't have been written had I been still living in the States.

What's it like playing a festival as opposed to your solo shows? Is there much of a difference, even in just atmosphere and crowd interaction and that kind of thing?

Well I guess even though the crowd is kind of smaller at your own show it's probably going to be more rewarding in some sense because you might feel that if it's going well you're more responsible for it. Where as at a festival, you might be playing to a lot of people that have never heard you and might not even like what you're doing.

Even if they like it and they haven't really heard of you they probably won't be soaking it in, you know? They might not seem very animated or something like that. I mean that's happened to us. We've played in front of sort of blank faces, but everybody's done that of course. Yeah it's kind of difficult to tell if they hate you or are quietly appreciating what you're doing.

Well I suppose that in a solo show that audience is there specifically to see

you.

Yeah it's that simple thing you know. So I think I much prefer a small supportive audience than a more indifferent, bigger audience.

So you guys are playing the Perth Festival this year. What's next after that?

Well we're just going to totally make another album basically. And we have a couple of bits of pieces we're doing throughout the year but no huge tours or anything like that. I think we're just going to bunk down and try and be creative.

Do you have any idea what sort of direction you'll be heading in with the new album?

I have a really general idea. But I don't have the songs yet really. I'm not really going to use as many acoustic instruments. I mean my goal will be to make different sounds that I haven't before. I really just want to make songs in a different kind of way and just try not to be conventional basically

The Ruby Suns play at Beck's Music Box on Saturday March 7 (along with [High Places](#) and [Architecture and Helsinki DJs](#)), as part of the Perth International Arts Festival. Standard tickets \$35