



NEW MUSIC

By Jim Gellatly

SPARES

WHO: Ewan Santer (vocals/synths/percussion), Toby Brunning (guitar), Dave McManus (synth/vocals/percussion), Lucie Miller (synth/vocals/percussion), Adam MacMillan (bass/synth), Stuart Brunton (guitar), Lewis Gale (drums/percussion).

WHERE: Edinburgh.

FOR FANS OF: New Order, Foals, LCD Soundsystem.

JIM SAYS: I first came across Spares a couple of years ago, and fell in love with a song called Home. I didn't know much about them, but the sound coming out of the speakers is what really matters. It had me hooked.

The collective is still a bit of a mystery, but then they've yet to play a live show. That's set to change with their first shows planned later in the year in Edinburgh, London and Hamburg.

That may sound a trifle ambitious for an unknown band, but each member has paid their dues over the past decade or so. The band's lineage includes such past and present acts as Stanley Odd, Make Model, Chutes, The Little Kicks and The Lonely Together.

Ewan told me: "We are the 'spare' parts of many bands coming together. I think we have all graced the T Break stage at T in the Park in various guises over the years. We have all appeared on the same gig bills, becoming friends and admirers of each other's music and talents."

Encouraged by the initial



response to their original 2014 three-track demo Spares have been beaver away in the studio. They've just released a double A-side single called I with work on the follow-up II already under way. The two songs on I are a perfect musical calling card that has me desperate for more. Truth, Love & Beauty is a glorious slab of disco infused underground electro that wouldn't be out of place on legendary New York label DFA. Underground, but with pop sensibility at its core. Friends Of Mine, meanwhile, veers towards piano house, while retaining a lo-fi indie feel. Both tracks are incredibly danceable and ripe for remixes.

Ewan said: "Spares is quite different from the other bands we play in. It's more of a collaborative process. Everyone is free to bring their ideas to the table. It's more dance orientated, there are more synths and the songs don't all follow a standard structure. On a personal level I find it fun and exciting when we all get together."

When Spares do unveil themselves live, I reckon we are in for a treat. Ewan added: "Our key objective is to create the best live performance we can possibly put together. More than just a gig."

I can't wait!

More: www.facebook.com/WeAreSpares

● Jim presents a weekly showcase of New Music on Amazing Radio on Sundays, 2-4pm.

www.amazingradio.com
www.jimgellatly.com



See video of band at:
thescottishsun.co.uk

By JACQUI SWIFT

BIFFY Clyro never planned to take a whole year off after they finished touring last album, 2013's *Opposites*.

But when they began the process of making their next album, something wasn't right.

Singer Simon Neil explains: "When I started writing songs at the start of last year, I realised that, for the first time, I was writing songs anticipating the band's and record company's reaction."

"That was a bad start. So I went away, made another record (*under his solo name of ZCC*) to forget about that pressure and remember the joy of making music."

New album *Ellipsis* sees the Killmarnock trio return to their heavy roots with some of their most impassioned songs in years.

Simon adds: "We started practising three or four days a week, like we did when we were 15."

"We are a band rooted in our real life and feelings, so spending time with our families, learning to be normal again, was just what we needed."

"We can't write or sing about life on the tour bus in Hungary, it's not real. So for the first time in years we had to let go and stopped looking at the calendar and knowing we were on tour or off doing something else. We just enjoyed life again."

Biffy Clyro – Simon, drummer Ben Johnston and his twin brother bassist James, all 36 – have been in Los Angeles for the last few months putting the finishing touches to *Ellipsis* when we meet at a West Hollywood hotel.

There's a tray of margaritas and soft drinks being delivered to their table. The trio are in celebratory mood with album number seven nearly finished.

'It was like starting all over again'

In good spirits, they're joking with their record label people who accompany them, while Simon's wife Francesca says how she thinks *Ellipsis* is her favourite Biffy album in ages.

What's clear is this new album is the sound of a rejuvenated band.

"We didn't want to go on cruise control," says Ben.

"We'd much rather be terrified that everyone is going to hate this record than try and do something that is a surefire hit. And after a double album we wanted to make sure it was really streamlined and down to just ten to 12 tracks."

"We wanted to feel like we were 18 years old again, making our first record with that kind of impact and impression. Thinking no one gave a f*** again is actually quite healthy."

James adds: "It was like throwing everything out of the window and starting again."

The band says that despite being one of our biggest rock bands and headlining festivals, they've never felt like they belong.

Simon says: "We'll always be outsiders."

"We grew up in a small town in Scotland and we were never taught music, we learned from ourselves and it's part of our characteristic."

"We're not allowed to be rock stars when we are back home," says Ben. "It's just the Scottish mentality."

Writing the album at home in Scotland and recording it in LA with producer Rich Costey while living together in a house in the Hollywood Hills, is, says Simon, "a contradiction."

He laughs: "We were out at dinner with John Taylor from Duran Duran last night. How LA is that?"

"We need to be at home and on our own to write yet we come here to LA, where it's all about people's dreams. And that then feeds into the record. Everywhere you go in



this city you see beautiful people as waiters, wanting to be actors.

"But then the glamour of the city fades away when you stay here for a while and see the dark underbelly. There's a stench of desperation here."

"So here is as much the American dream as the death of the American dream and that ying and yang works well with our band. There is no middle ground and that's the same with this city."

Biffy are a band who have experienced ups and downs.

In 2013, Ben revealed that his addiction to alcohol while making *Opposites* nearly split up the band, who have been together since they were teenagers.

But after a stint in AA, he got sober and "has been in a good place ever since."

He wasn't the only member going through a hard time. In 2013, the band were forced to cancel a number of gigs citing frontman Simon's "serious respiratory problem". He was suffering from anxiety and

panic attacks and feared he was going to have a full-on nervous breakdown.

"My head was all over the place," he admits. "And I felt like I was so alone in it all."

"I know people who suffer with mental health and depression sometimes feel alone because no one understands."

"I look like I have this great life and I do – look we are here in LA on this beautiful evening. But I felt unfulfilled and I wasn't happy. I also couldn't write for a while."

Recovering at home, Simon was unable to leave his house for more than a month. Francesca, who had quit her job as a schoolteacher,

decided to take her husband to LA for a long holiday, to rest and clear his head.

"Frankie was there for me and we worked through it."

"I've been surprised by the amount of people who have gone through a similar thing."

"There is strength to be taken from that. It's brutal but there is room for support and help."

"That is all anyone wants and I think that we can help each other do that. And it was this point, when I was in LA and getting help that my songs progressed into this new album. That is why we've made a f*** you record."

First single *Wolves of Winter* is a snarling album opener that came from watching a David Attenborough documentary.

Simon says: "I was watching the wolves and how they protect their land. I've felt like that about the band at certain points."

"Whether it's a pressure from labels or people with certain

'My head was all over the place and I felt so alone in all of it. I was feeling unfulfilled'