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## JIMMY EAT WORLD

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In today's prefab pop idol marketplace, there must be more pre-teen would-be superstars than ever, all vying for that elusive major-label contract. Hell, they even have prime time TV shows about it! For the members of Jimmy Eat World, however, having released two major-label albums before hitting legal drinking age, the freedom from that same contract would put the Mesa, Ariz., foursome on the path to its very finest work: *Bleed American*, Jimmy Eat World's fourth LP and first for DreamWorks Records, recorded on the band's own dime in the aftermath of the band's being dropped from their previous label.

"There was no record company, no A and R guy, no manager-- just us," says singer-guitarist Jim Adkins. "We looked at the whole thing as a liberating experience, rather than part of any deliberate plan."

Indeed, record-industry fate had effectively given Jimmy Eat World a new lease on life. After the band's split with the label in August 1999, they commemorated their independence with a self-promoted, five-week tour of Europe, their first ever. That the erstwhile record company had not released Jimmy Eat World material overseas was hardly an obstacle: Ever resourceful, the band simply purchased their own records directly from the distributor and shipped them to Europe independently.

"The best thing that company ever did for us was to buy us a van," recalls drummer Zach Lind, demonstrating the band's enduring positivity. "We really got their money's worth out of it. We treated touring like guerrilla warfare, which had other benefits aside from just saving money; it forced us to interact with people who had a real interest in the band's success, to make friends as well as fans. Even when we were on a major, we always acted like we weren't; we acted like an indie band. Our attitude was, 'So what if we don't have the support of our label? We have the support of our fans.'"

Within a year, Jimmy Eat World's profile in Europe had grown exponentially. Germany was particularly receptive, welcoming the band back in 2000 for Bizarre and PopKomm, two of the country's biggest festivals. Their return coincided with success on the German charts for *Clarity*, the quartet's 1999 offering. That year also saw Jimmy Eat World release their Singles compilation on indie Big Wheel Recreation, licensing the collection to Japanese label Toys Factory and channeling the proceeds to the recording of *Bleed American* (released July 24, 2001). A U.S. tour following *Singles*-- as well as a split EP with tourmates Jebediah (which featured an early version of *Bleed American*'s "Cautioners")-- further augmented the new record's budget.

By the fall of 2000, they'd banked enough to finish the album without skimping. Lind reminisces: "When the record was being mixed, I felt the best I'd ever felt about all of this. When we first got dropped, we said, 'Let's get down to business; let's do what we do best.' We'd taken a risk and now it had paid off."

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Jimmy Eat World has always done its best work when left to its own devices. After all, since the band's inception in 1994, it has amassed a large and devoted hometown crowd through numerous self-booked shows, a handful of DIY 7-inch singles, split records recorded with other bands and an eponymous album released on Tempe, Ariz.-based Wooden Blue Records.

In 1995, which marked the departure of original bassist Mitch Porter and his replacement by Rick Burch, Jimmy Eat World signed a major-label deal and began recording *Static Prevails*, issued in 1996. Critics and college radio programmers noted the intriguing range of the disc, introduced by the infectious, up-tempo opener "Thinking, That's All" and cemented with the subdued finale "Anderson Mesa." Despite their status as a major-label band, however, Adkins, guitarist-singer Tom Linton, Burch and Lind handled the most crucial artist-development chores on their own. Continuing to slog it out on the road, they still managed to record and release split singles with comrades Mineral, Jejeune, Sense Field and Blueprint.

Clarity, co-produced by the band and longtime collaborator Mark Trombino (Blink-182, Drive Like Jehu), arrived in early 1999. In true Jimmy Eat World fashion, the disc was preceded by a self-titled EP released on tiny independent Fueled By Ramen that featured the Clarity standouts "Lucky Denver Mint" and "For Me This Is Heaven" and a demo version of "Your New Aesthetic." The band's indefatigable efforts began to pay off when Clarity's first-week sales alone amounted to nearly half of what *Static Prevails* had sold to date.

"Lucky Denver Mint" began gaining momentum at Los Angeles' trend-setting KROQ and was even tapped for inclusion on the soundtrack to the Drew Barrymore flick "Never Been Kissed." Nonetheless, it seemed that Jimmy's agenda and that of the label were following along divergent paths. In Clarity's lyrics careful listeners detected a business world-weariness that belied the band's tender age ("The formula is too thin ... / Imitate and water down"; "Don't kid yourself/ You know they want money"). Before long, Jimmy Eat World and their label parted ways.

"In retrospect, I'm glad those records didn't blow up," Adkins says. "It's tough living single to single, hit to hit. We're very fortunate we had the opportunity to tour and build a real fan base. We've been without the benefit of label support, a song on the radio or even a deal for the last two years, but we're consistently able to play to 600 people a night."

Jimmy Eat World's post-major-label stealth enabled them to record *Bleed American* (co-produced with Trombino) completely free of distraction, which resulted in what many consider their most accomplished songcraft and focused performances yet. "I've heard the best ideas are the ones you think you shouldn't use at first," Adkins says. "You do your best work when you skirt your boundaries. If you like something you've written but you have issues with it, you're probably on the right track. With this record, I found it was more challenging to write concise pop songs than to get really progressive and abstract."

All of which is not to say that Jimmy Eat World has abandoned the energy or innovation of its previous works. First radio track "Bleed American," for example, launches the record with a furious melody, propelling a lyric of hard-won wisdom. The song's stick-to-the-ribs hooks quickly inspired KROQ, San Francisco's Live 105, Washington, D.C.'s WHFS, San Diego's 91X, Boston's WBCN and Atlanta's 99X, among other radio powerhouses, to play it pre-release--and pre-record deal.

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"Bleed American' isn't about any one thing," Adkins explains. "It's about a general dissatisfaction and a yearning for something more-- not necessarily something material but emotional. It describes a feeling that something's missing."

Elsewhere on Bleed American, songs like "Sweetness," "If You Don't, Don't" and "Your House" seem to harbor a romantic sensibility, though Adkins prefers not to specify. "I look at these songs more as moods than statements," he says. "However people choose to interpret them is fine." To be sure, the record's more experimental turns, like the somber "Get It Faster" or the expansive "Cautioners," leave as much room for the listener's own experiences and emotions as anything on Static Prevails or Clarity.

"It's like any form of artistic expression," Adkins concludes. "Whether it's art, music, literature, whatever-- hopefully you get something out of it. If not, I guess we've failed. But, hopefully, you do."

