

Black Rebel Motorcycle Club

Fighting The Demons By Callum Fitzpatrick

It's 2am in Italy when Black Rebel Motorcycle Club bassist and singer Robert Levon Been picks up the phone, so I wasn't exactly expecting a chirpy reaction from the Californian. To my surprise, he's sounding as alert as ever. "This is actually my prime time," he laughs. "I ask to do my interviews in the early hours as it's when I'm most awake. When I'm on tour, I'm an insomniac and I'll just stay awake all night and sleep all day. It's also good because I hit peak energy when I'm onstage at 10pm. The problem is that I can't come down after that, so I'm just fucking up all night, every night."

It's been a rough few years for Been – his father Michael, the frontman and bass player for '80s cult band, The Call, and BRMC's sound man and mentor, died of a heart attack on tour with the band in August 2010. The garage rockers' seventh album *Specter At The Feast* almost functioned as a coping mechanism for the band, with Been previously saying, "The only thing that felt good was just getting together, plugging in, and turning up loud as shit. It was kind of this therapeutic process, playing really loud, and just feeling this energy; letting that be a release. It really helped us pull out of that darkest place that we were in."

Now, half a year after the record's release, Been says the band has had time to reflect. "Right around now is when the songs start to take a definite shape live and they become their own monsters. The first month of release you're used to hearing those recordings and you're imagining everyone hearing them for the first time, so you want to represent them as closely as possible. But after a while they start growing and changing for the live environment. We're at that stage where we're just having fun hearing them mutate."

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Even though the latest release is still fresh in the minds of many of BRMC's notoriously faithful fan base, the group has already started to formulate ideas for their next album. "It's mostly just the music and rough melodies at the moment," Been says. "Some words come here and there in the moment, but it's difficult to focus on one continual thought. You're resonating on a feeling and you need time to daydream on it ... On the road, this process is continually hijacked – as much as you try and stay in one state of mind, as soon as you play a two-hour set you're in a different state, you're wherever the audience's energy is at. It breaks the spell and that's why it's hard to write words and finish songs. Once we get home we usually have tonnes of half songs and early ideas that become what we eventually create for the album and they still have that raw energy to them."

But Been adds that knowing the point in which a song is ready to be turned into a tangible product is a constant struggle for the band. "I feel like a song is never done, really. There are tracks from the first record that still have room to grow. When you record something, you have a series of moments of surrender. The first one is when you first release the record, then it's when you play the song live and then there's a point you need to try and stop fucking with it as you have to be respectful of the fact that the song is not entirely yours anymore. I never like to look at a track as 'finished' because sometimes they are still changing and sometimes they get better. Actually, usually they do."

The downside to this never-ending evolution of music is that you inevitably find flaws in a song's first pressing. "You wish you could go back sometimes, but then again, changing a song live makes it special for the people that come out and see us. It's especially important these days where everything's so available and people have such a collector-obsessed mindset – they download B-sides and rare versions of everything. Now a lot of people are like, 'I'm gonna get 10,000 fucking songs on my iTunes. I'll barely listen to any of them, but I've got them and they're mine'. Everyone

wants *everything*, but as soon as they get it, they put it out of their mind. So it's nice to have something special and unobtainable for people to look forward to when they come out to shows."

BRMC will be heading Down Under for Harvest Festival later this year and Been appears genuinely humbled by the opportunity. "You're not guaranteed to make it outside your country after every album. I feel that we could probably get to Europe and fail, but you don't get to fucking Australia and Japan without a little bit of luck and a good response from the record. It's always a good feeling to find out there's been a proper invitation to play there. It feels like we did something right."

What: Harvest Festival in the Domain
With: Massive Attack, Franz Ferdinand, Volcano Choir, Goldfrapp, Eels, The Drones, The Wallflowers and more
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