

## Interview

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### Third Eye Blind - 06/16/15

 Interviewed by [Chrisanne Grise](#)


It's not always easy to be a Third Eye Blind fan. You've got to deal with long delays between album releases, and frequent controversy as musicians join and leave the band. But fans were finally rewarded last week when the group released *Dopamine*, its fifth studio album (and the first since 2009's *Ursa Major*). I spoke with lead singer Stephan Jenkins about the new record, touring with Dashboard Confessional, and stealing moves from Taylor Swift.

#### Happy record release day! How does it feel to finally have *Dopamine* out?

You know, it feels really good. There's a real sense of levity now, I think for all of us. This is definitely the happiest time in this band so far. I do a lot of back-and-forth with myself over the songs. I actually put some of what I go through into the spoken word part of "Say It," where she's asking, "What's the matter with you?" K.Flay does it on the album, but it's a piece that I wrote. [More sample lyrics: "Nothing you write will ever match this. You should go back to that actress."]

And so once the album is out, once we're done with it, I feel a lightness. Steven Spielberg said that he never finished a film, he just releases them. I feel that same way.

#### Right. You could always keep changing it around, so you finally just have to decide you're done.

Yeah. What's funny is, I'll keep playing with a song, and then every time I'll end up going with the first impulse. I'll go back to the song and be like "Wait a second, the first impulse was actually what we're going to go with for the album."

*Dopamine* is also number one on iTunes right now. That shouldn't matter. I don't pay attention to any of that shit. I didn't look, but some friends told me. You know, I wish it didn't have any effect on me at all. And it mostly doesn't. I don't look at or read stuff like that.

#### Right, but when you've worked hard on something, it's nice that a lot of people are out there listening to it.

Yeah, and when you're selling more records than Taylor Swift, you feel okay. *[laughs]*

#### That is a big accomplishment these days!

A friend of mine has a third grader who is a Third Eye Blind fan and also a Taylor Swift fan. She'd been to a Taylor Swift show the night before our show, and I asked her what she thought. She said Taylor was always looking over her shoulder at the audience to catch the video camera. I was like, "I am stealing that shit!" So I did it one time the other night. I told our drummer Brad about this and I looked at him in the middle of a song and then I looked over my shoulder and I gave a surprised look to the audience, and he started crying laughing.


#### That's funny. Hopefully it will work for you then if you use it some more on the tour.

Oh yeah. I'll make a little shtick out of it, I'm sure.


**I know *Dopamine* is going to be your last traditional album release, and then you're going to release songs online individually as you record them. Would you be open to recording any old fan-favorite songs, like "Gorgeous" or "Alright Caroline"?**

Yeah, thanks for asking about those. For sure, we are going to just start recording everything. I'm going to put them out there


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
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
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
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and stop over-thinking.

I don't even know how "Alright Caroline" got out there. I don't think it's really an entirely finished song, but so many people have asked about it that we'll just put it out there. The same thing with "Gorgeous."

**Great! Do you think you'll start recording again as soon as you're done the tour, or are you going to take a break for a while? Do you have any sort of timeline?**

Yeah, no more long breaks! After this tour, we're going to take two weeks off in August, where I'm going to go surfing in Indonesia. And then I'm going to come back and we will definitely get recording some songs. There are six songs that we were trying to decide if they were going to go on the new record, and they're totally recorded. I just have to do some vocals on two of them, and then mix them. So that's going to happen pretty soon. And then the vinyl is going to come out as well. And then I'm really going to start recording on a regular basis, where I write a song and I'm just going to record it and post it to share with the universe and see what happens from there.

**That sounds awesome, and less stressful for you and the band.**

I think so! Music more often tightens that bond between us and our audience. It's about the happiness quotient for me. I have no idea how it monetizes and I'm just not going to get hung up on being concerned about it. It makes me happier when I have a song and I put it out there, so that's what we're gonna do. And my record company is like, "Okay, we'll figure that out." They get that that's what's on the docket. And then if we get a collection of songs together and we put out an EP, great. And if post facto, we can collect those individual songs together and make an album from that, that'd be fine too. I just have to stop worrying about it.

**What happened to *Ursa Minor*? Do you think we'll ever hear those songs?**

Yeah, I think so. We just kinda started over again, and I think that was the right thing for us to do.

**You guys have played tons of college shows over recent years. You once commented on the fact that you'd almost become an underground band again.**

Yeah, which is always what we thought we were! We were an indie DIY band that wrote some pretty tunes, and then that ran away from us. But that's always how we saw ourselves. We were looked at differently through other people's lenses but not through our own.

**I was actually talking to a middle-aged music critic recently, and he asked me, "Why is it all you kids are obsessed with Third Eye Blind now?"**

I know, isn't that crazy? Our audience is not just millennials, they're like, Gen Z. They were not around for any of our MTV stuff. There's no date stamp on any of our music that's online—it just looks like a playlist. So it's available like anything else, and they're finding it. And I don't have anything to do with it. It blows my mind. They find our band through each other. There's an organic culture that these kids have for themselves. I'm always intrigued to see what songs really resonate with them.

**Are there any songs in particular that you've noticed they're really drawn to?**

"Wounded" comes to mind. On tour, that tends to be one of the biggest songs of the night. And "Why Can't You Be" gets more calls than "How's It Gonna Be," for example. That's because they weren't told what to like or what not to like. They just found the songs that they like.

**At one of the Third Eye Blind shows I went to a few years ago, you guys didn't play several of your big singles. Do you get tired of playing songs like "Semi-Charmed Life" over and over?**

Honestly, I don't. Someone wrote something about "Semi-Charmed Life," like, "I listen to it and for a brief moment, everything's perfect and it's summer." The song stays alive because of the energy I receive from it when I'm playing.

But it doesn't feel like it's mine anymore either. A new song like "Blade," I still feel really connected to and something like "Back to Zero" feels very personal. But with "Semi-Charmed Life," I feel like I'm participating in somebody else's thing.

**It belongs to everyone now.**

Right!

**Speaking of which, "Get Me Out of Here" seems pretty personal too. Does that reflect anxiety of your own about performing?**

Yeah, it does. I think that this album is, in a way, about having your life and your emotions hustled. "Get Me Out of Here" is about being commodified. But it's also kinda like an overwrought rock opera. I love *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, so this is a reference to that. And I love the Smiths and the histrionics of those songs, so that's what I was doing.

**Your debut album is now 18 years old. Is there something that you wish you'd known way back then when you started?**

*[laughs]* Oh for sure! There's a lot I wish I'd known back then. Oh God! I didn't know anything. I was too scared to trust anybody else, and when I did, I'd get totally screwed over.

Specifically one thing that comes to mind—and this is what I would tell other artists when they're coming up—is that you really do have a choice. We were pushed into marketing and branding that we never recognized. We would do photo shoots and I would look at them and just flatline. I was like, "I have no relationship to this. I don't know what this is." It was just our record company trying to get the quickest line to a dollar. And we would have fights and arguments about it, but what we didn't realize is that we could just say no. My friend right now is being offered a record deal and he really wants to get the radio play that they're offering, and of course they want his soul for it. He's like tripping out over all those things. So that was what I told him. The way that you see things, your image, your music—just keep that true to yourself and then it will be eligible to actually travel into something else. I think for us, so much of that stuff needed to wear off.

**Good advice. Switching gears a little, you're on tour with Dashboard Confessional now. It's funny, because I used to cry over Dashboard songs but your music usually makes me feel happy, so it's an interesting mix.**

*[laughs]* When they asked us, I liked the idea because I respect Chris. He's like his own indie, his own thing, and it's not anybody else's. He's not a radio, corporate thing at all. He's opened up for hardcore bands, and he's kinda hardcore. That kid can skate! We've been having a great time. I think we've really enjoyed each other, the bands and the crew, just having a fun time. Almost every night after the show we have this little bonfire. Well that's a bit of an overstatement, it's like those Presto-to-logs in a shitty little fire pit with lawn furniture around it. But everybody gathers around and we chit-chat. So it's fun, like being at camp.

The other great thing about this tour is I've gotten to invite bands that I really like to come with us. We've had a new band called No Wyld out with us. I first heard like, 4 or 8 bars of their music, and was like "What is this?" They're one of my favorite new bands. They're so brand new, and their record isn't even out yet. The first show that they played was like 5,000 people out at Asbury Park, and then the next night, we were at Jones Beach, which is a big arena, and they were tripping out. It's just really fun to see.

**In the last few years, you've added three new members, and fans don't know quite as much about them. Can you tell me something about each of them?**

Kryz Reid is from Dublin, Ireland. He sat in with our drummer Brad Hargreaves when Brad was playing with this other three-piece heavy rock band in Europe. Kryz had such a great attitude that when we needed a guitar player, we didn't look at anybody else. Also, he taught himself Japanese while on tour. He's very smart.

Alex LeCavalier is our bass player. Put your hands over your ears when we play live, so you can listen to the bass. When you go to a concert, you just feel the bass, but if you cover your ears, you can actually listen to it. You will go, "Oh my God!" It feels so good to hear that. He also oddly loves the L.A. Kings. He's not from L.A., but he really does love them and he always has. I just don't care about sports very much but he loves them so much that I get contact love.

And then Alex Kopp was a roadie but he grew up in a recording studio so he's very handy. He's just a punk! He's 23 years old, and he's pure mischief. He started sitting in when we needed keyboard parts played. He really likes pop music but he listens to it like it's rock. Like, he'll listen to Frank Ocean like it's hardcore or something. It's very strange. But we were playing one night about a year and a half ago, and I told Alex onstage that we wanted him in the band. I said, "We just thought we'd let you know that you're not on the road crew anymore." And he's got this attitude all the time, but he just fucking melted. It was just too much.

**Sounds like a nice moment.**

Yeah, they're a great band. It's such a good feeling to play. We don't have backing tracks. We make this shit up as we go, and that means we can either fall apart or totally take off. That state of not knowing exactly what's going to happen, that sense of anticipation, it's what keeps me energized. Because every band nowadays just plays along with a sequencer and it's all to a click track and I don't understand how you are eligible to transcend above yourself and take off if that's what's going on.

**When your bassist Leo Kremer left the band to start Dos Toros [a chain of Mexican taqueria restaurants in New York]—**

[shouts] Yum!

**I know, so good!**

We frequent Dos Toros. But when Leo left the band, it just broke my heart because he was my best friend. We would go to museums on tour all the time. We'd be in Cincinnati and he'd be like, "Where's the local art show happening?"

My favorite picture ever of the band on tour was me and Leo. We're sitting there on the bed, and it's super late in the tour. Someone had just told a joke, and we're both crying laughing, we were so punchy. It's just that moment.

**He seemed like a great guy, so I was sad to see him leave. But I'm glad that Dos Toros has worked out so well for him.**

I'm just glad that Dos Toros is working itself into your article.

**I know we're running out of time, but was there anything else you wanted to talk about?**

The only other thing I want to say is that the *Dopamine* album cover is my favorite ever.

**Is there a story behind it?**

We were recording in the studio and there's this long hallway. Stephan Albanese has taken lots of photos for us, and he did all of the artwork for this album. He shot me jumping in the hallway. It's got this sense of the light at the end of the tunnel, like jumping for joy, but also being isolated.

We all said, let's not have anything on the cover. There's no moniker, and the only place it says Third Eye Blind is on the photo of the case on the back. I just like it when I see it. That's my aesthetic, not compromised.



**Chrisanne Grise**

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Great interview! Not holding my breath, but I hope he stays true to his word about releasing music more frequently from here on out.

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#3