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THE WALL

A Conversation with Jakob Dylan By Nicole Sandler

Bringing Down The Horse has been out just over a year and The Wallflowers have recently begun to take things to the next level. On July 2, they embarked on a co-headlining tour with Counting Crows which will last through August 9. And a few weeks ago, they headlined their hometown LA's Universal Amphitheatre for the first time, having previously played only clubs and small theaters.

The Wallflowers are certainly another excellent example of the power of Adult Rock Radio to launch careers. When "6th Avenue Heartache" was released 14 months ago, it was an instant add at the format, and the ensuing months have seen the band's sophomore effort hold tough anywhere from #5 to #1 on the Adult Rock airplay charts. In this issue, we're also featuring an interview with Interscope's James Evans, so it only seemed natural to include a feature on The Wallflowers, as well. The problem was seeing if Jakob Dylan was available for an interview.

To my surprise, I discovered our very own Nicole Sandler (*The Album Network's* Rock Music Director and former KSCA/Los Angeles Music Director) was already slated to interview Dylan for an AN feature. When I asked her if she'd mind talking to him a little longer so we could present an extended piece in *totallyadult*, she quickly responded, "Mind? I'd love to!"

—John Schoenberger

I'll get the dumb question out of the way first, OK? It's been just over a year since the album came out, it's Double-Platinum, showing no signs of slowing down...how does it feel now?

"I feel tired, but it obviously feels good, I mean, it's been a lot of work...I've been home very little so I don't know...I have to have my manager give me the updates all the time 'cause I really have no idea what's going on half the time."

You're doing really well.

"That's what they tell me."

I just got back from New York where I saw your face all over bus kiosks in New York. Everywhere I went, there you were.

"I'm sorry."

It's OK; it's a nice, familiar face.

"Well, I hear there's a billboard out here in LA somewhere, too."

I haven't seen that yet.

"I haven't either; I'm horrified to leave the house. When I was asked about it, they said it was gonna be in some bus stops in New York—I thought, 'Well, I won't be there for a while, so I guess that's fine.' And then I find out they actually used the same art for billboards out here somewhere, so I'm staying in the house..."

Don't want to come face to face with them, huh?

"No, my face is big enough as it is. I don't need to see it three stories tall."

Before this record came out, did you take a moment and think about what you wanted it to accomplish in terms of success?

"No, not at all. I never thought that far ahead, I just wanted to make the record that was right for us to make, I wanted to make sure the songs were right. I never really considered what it was gonna do, or what it might do, or what I wanted it to do. You know, I just wanted to get the record right and get back on the road."

You didn't think about seeing your face in giant billboards on Sunset Blvd.

"I did *not* really imagine that would happen to me."

FLOWERS



The Wallflowers' original guitarist, Tobi Miller, left the band after completing *Bringing Down The Horse*.

"He actually officially left the group a few weeks before we started the record, but it was a friendly split, and he'd written a lot of parts and he was still part of the sound and was still part of what I was trying to do...so he just came in and continued to play, even though he really wasn't a member of the group at that time."

Now his band, Maypole, has released its first album. Do you have any sage advice for him?

"Not really. He seems to be doing OK on his own. He could probably give me some. The only advice I could give him is keep your face off the billboards." [Laughs]

The only other original member of the band is Rami Jaffee, who's about to become a dad.

"Yeah, in August...he's gonna take some time off from touring. We've got a friend who'll fill in."

How weird will that be—looking over and not seeing Rami?

"It's probably gonna be pretty strange. He's the only one that I've always seen on my left, you know? The faces have come and gone, but it's always felt like the group 'cause Rami—visually and his personality—has always been a big part of it, so it's probably gonna be a bit odd for a few minutes, I'm sure."

Speaking of dads, how's yours doing?

"He's fine. It got blown way out of proportion. I was over in Europe and doing, like, five interviews a day and every journalist had to ask me about it. You know, after awhile it was getting a bit tedious. All I could really say was, 'I promise you that if there was a problem, I would not be sitting here in Copenhagen in an awful coffee bar talking to you.'"

I think when there's a lack of information, people fabricate things, so there was this giant media frenzy.

"He doesn't speak to the press at all, so it didn't really help the situation that, you know, people were genuinely concerned and his camp wasn't really commenting one way or the other [about] what was going on. And since I don't really talk about him either, when I was in Europe, they assumed he was in a really bad way, they assumed that if I wasn't going home, we weren't talking. I would go through the airport and I'd see his picture everywhere. I thought it was kind of drag, in *USA Today* they had a thing on him and the last paragraph said 'Jakob Dylan is not expected to cancel his European tour to go home and be with him.' The whole article was set up like he was sick and I wouldn't cancel my European tour."

Meanwhile, if it was something really serious, of course, you would have been there in a second.

"In a second, yeah. I mean, even if it was remotely serious, I would have come home. I can't tell you how *unserious* it actually was."

“I just wanted to make the record that was right for us to make, I wanted to make sure the songs were right. I never really considered what it was gonna do, or what it might do, or what I wanted it to do.”

I won't get into a lot of uncomfortable questions, but I do want to ask about the Rolling Stone interview. In it, you dealt with a subject that you haven't really been very open about. Why did you finally decide to do it?

“I do understand that when people are interested in any artist, their past, their history, how they grew up and who they are is interesting at a certain point. I mean, I have the same interest in the people I admire; you know, I want to know a little bit about them. I just kind of felt that if I was going to accept doing the cover story for *Rolling Stone*, I couldn't pull that anymore—and I did think that it had a genuine place in the article. I still only gave up about 15% of the information I actually have, but up until that point I had only given up 3%—which was acknowledging that yes, it's true, I am related.”

Now that you've come this far, it feels right to give in to people's curiosity about something that's a part of you?

“Right, it is exactly that, it is part of me...and the truth is I'm proud of who I am. It's just always been a distraction which kind of gets me into hot water, like I was saying before about the illness he had. You know, by having not talked about him for so long, it gives people the impression that we're not close—which isn't true, but I just thought it was all right at this point to do it.”

It definitely was and the article came out great—it was a nice piece.

“I was really happy with it. I spent a lot of time with Gerri Hirshey, the writer. At one point I was kind of concerned that she wasn't really badgering me enough, because it's not easy to get me to talk about those things...but I was prepared to go a little bit of distance with her and then, halfway through, I was getting kind of concerned, like, she's not asking anything, she's not pushing me. Then, when the article came out, I realized that was actually part of her interview, you know, the information that I would talk about and what I wouldn't talk about, it became part of her whole interview.”

Obviously, privacy is something that you grew up with...that you were taught since you could walk. So do you ever grapple with the fact that, as a songwriter, you're sharing your deepest emotions—I would think that all comes out in your writing.

“Yeah, of course it does, but it just depends on what kind of writer you want to be. I mean, some songs I have probably seem like they're pure entertainment,

when actually they're a lot more than that. You know that songwriters have small ways of entertaining themselves to get those ideas across without feeling like they're being too obvious.”

So you don't feel like you're giving away your deepest, darkest thoughts?

“I think I speak about everything I want to speak about, but you don't have to be that obvious all the time. It's important to say the things, but I don't think it's necessarily important for people to understand what you're saying. More and more of the whole process is for you to say it; it's not really so that you know all these hundreds and thousands of people that you don't know will understand you.”

So it's OK for them to read their own meanings into them?

“I prefer it, actually. I never really talk about the words only because, you know, half the time what people get out of your songs is better than what you're writing about.”

Was there a conscious decision not to print your lyrics?

“Yeah, well, partly because of that. I think what people get out of songs is the most important thing, not to get what you're writing about. And the other thing is, I write songs and lyrics to go together. So, if you get the CD pull-out and it's got lyrics printed in it, that's like looking at a painting in black and white—it's only half of it. Those words are meant to go with the melody and a certain cadence, and if you don't have the melody and the tempos, they're totally taken out of context.”

But don't you look at it as poetry on its own? Not to bring up your dad again, but his songs were/are...the poetry of my generation.

“Right, well I certainly think a lot of it is but, you know, it's very simple...I just made a choice, ‘Yes, no, yes, no...no. I'm not gonna print them, maybe, on the next one.’ And you know, I don't like quoting him myself, but when he got asked one time why he doesn't print his lyrics (which he does sometimes now), he said, ‘I don't want my fans to get them for free. So then you can put out a book, they can buy more stuff.’ [Laughter] My book is very small at this point.”

Have you been writing on the road?

“Yeah. It's a bit challenging, there's not a whole lot of time, especially this last month while I was in Europe. If I had any chance alone I just slept—but yeah, I've got a lot of songs right now, ready for

something. I tend to keep all the ideas I get. On the road, I finish about 80% and they need 20% of real work when I get home. There will eventually be a lot of time to do that part, so I just keep track of them all on little recorders and on paper.”

Do you have a favorite part of this whole process? Do you like the touring? I think I read somewhere you don't particularly like the studio process.

“It's just that I have a short attention span, that's all. You know, just being in one room for a long amount of time drives me nuts. I do like the road, it's like anybody's life...you know, you do live out there just like anybody, it is a job and it does become your life. Nobody gets up every day and loves a 100% of their life, really.”

How about the business side of it? Are you involved with that much?

“Of course, I'm involved with it. I know everything. I keep very close tabs on all of that, but I've also been lucky to work with people that I trust and have done a good job for a long time for me.”

Do you get involved with tour schedules or what single is gonna be worked next or all that?

“Things like tour scheduling I do, but things like what singles are next, I don't get that involved with that, only because that's the record company's job. I like all the songs...if they can make any of them stick on the radio that's fine.”

This might be like asking a parent if they have a favorite child. Do you have a favorite song that you've written?

“I really don't, but I have favorite recordings. There are certain songs that I think came out really well, for which I give credit to all the people involved, not just my own part.”

The Rolling Stone article recounted a show in New Jersey where Bruce Springsteen played with you. Was that a thrill?

“Oh, of course it was, yeah. I'm sure you would have liked it. He was great to us. He took us out to his house, spent the day with us and then came by the show and did soundcheck. Then he got up and played a bunch of songs with us that night.”

Can you get starstruck?

“Oh yeah!”

So, Springsteen is there, you know he's gonna play...do you get nervous?

“If you don't, then you're just jaded, you know, so I definitely do. It's not so much starstruck...I mean, we're all human

beings, but when you think of a person's body of work and the capacity which they've been working in, you tend to get a bit intimidated.”

Sure, and the respect for the genius that you know is there, the fact that you grew up listening to his music.

“And that's where most of it comes from—your memories of when you did have a much cleaner mind and when you more purely adored people. I did meet The Clash and Joe Strummer years ago when I was a kid and I would still be just as nervous today if I was in a room with Joe Strummer, only because I remember being 13 and looking at his poster.”

Right, yeah. So someday you'll do a show with Joe Strummer joining you on stage?

“I hope so, we'll see. I'm hoping for it.”

Well, you've played lots of shows in Southern California, beginnings at Canter's Deli and Coconut Teaszer, then you played The Troubadour and John Anson Ford Amphitheatre. Now, you just headlined the Universal Amphitheatre. What kinds of feelings do you have doing that, being that this is home and that's a big step...do you think about that?

“It's levels, but it does seem like a big step. I mean, we've kind of put it off for a while, 'cause it seemed like we skipped a level—we went right from The Troubadour, which is maybe 400 or something, to doing the Universal and there is a step in the middle, which is like the Wiltern Theatre. But we've been gone so long that we just kind of missed that step. I guess everybody thought it was time to make a step up to the Universal.”

How much longer are you gonna be on the road, do you know?

“I have plans all the way through October.”

And then see what happens?

“Yeah. There's talk of going back to Europe.”

Did you like it over there?

“Yeah. I did like it a lot. It's just that I've been on the road for a year and a half and I didn't go there with a lot of stamina left. I've been pretty burned out and, as soon as we got there, the work had piled up. My day was booked up with interviews and televisions and then a show, and then all the meet & greets—all the stuff you do when you're starting a record, and I had already been a year into this record. But it was our first time playing there, so it was like starting over.”