

My Morning Jacket on cusp of greatness

 AP Associated Press

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1 hour, 3 minutes ago

A band straddling the indie rock and jam band worlds is generally unprecedented. But when that same band also gets invited to play with the Boston Pops and tour with Pearl Jam, something truly magical is taking place.

Just ask My Morning Jacket.

"We've never tried to be indie or a jam band. I don't think we're either," said drummer Patrick Hallahan. "I think it's incredible that any crowd takes us on as something they enjoy. It's a huge blessing."

When the band, based in Louisville, Ky., released "Z," its second major label album, last year, critics showered it with praise, calling this release the band's "OK Computer," referencing Radiohead's 1997 dynamic critical breakthrough. But the band members don't feel they're ready for that title.

"I hope this isn't our `OK Computer,'" said Hallahan, who has been best friends with MMJ founder and singer Jim James since they were 10. "They were completely naked on that album and had no boundaries. I still think we have more in us. (With `Z') we let loose, but I want to let loose even more."

The group's unique blend of country-influenced, grandiose echo rock that on "Z" was tinged with soul, reggae and even surf rock, has a way of bridging disparate musical audiences.

"We look out there and it's ageless and there are no lines between the people — it's such a hodgepodge of everybody," he said, describing the fan base. "It's always been what we've wanted to do — appeal to so many people all over the place. You don't get far (with one crowd). We never wanted to make one sound."

Perhaps that's why MMJ was invited to play with the Pops and Eddie Vedder and will return to Manchester, Tenn., for a fourth consecutive Bonnaroo Music & Arts Festival. MMJ has a sound that no other band in America has been able to copy. It's a seamless sound that thrives in big city arenas as much as it does around a campfire in rural America.

But the road for MMJ has not been entirely smooth.

In 2004, the band's entire world almost fell apart. That's when core members Johnny Quaid and Danny Cash quit in an emotional flash of exhaustion.

"You get cramped together and get bogged up and thrown down and the end result was that it was amazing that we all still liked each other and wanted to make music together," Hallahan said. "We understand where each other are coming from and never have to think about things. It's really there between the whole band."

My Morning Jacket's existence somewhat mirrors the almost 20-year friendship between Hallahan and James. There's an understanding and a sense of mutual respect and humility that has propelled the band to this place of near-greatness.

"This band has a force of its own that we don't have a handle on. It just keeps going forward," Hallahan said. "You just know when it's right and wrong and now it just feels so right. It's proven to us that it's something we should be doing."

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