

COPELAND

EAT, SLEEP, REPEAT

It's a problem that has plagued songwriters since the advent of multi-track recording: how do you make something lush and expansive in sound and arrangement yet intimate and relatable in spirit and performance? The answer is found on Copeland's third full-length release, *Eat, Sleep, and Repeat*, a beautifully dense sonic workshop of layered strings, aching melodies, and towering vocals that sounds as if it were made in your living room.

"We wanted everything to be really organic and not really rely on a lot of different programs and MIDI's," explains lead vocalist and songwriter Aaron Marsh. "We wanted to play everything, because we wanted to accent the things about the instrument that you don't think about being musical like fingernails on the keys and bow noise on a violin. We didn't edit out the fret noise on the guitars. We wanted to keep in the stuff that you don't normally think of as musical, because they are part of the instrument and what happens when you play." Guitarist and fellow-songwriter Bryan Laurensen adds, "We focused a lot more on individual parts and moods this time around. We used a lot of instrumentation that we had never tried before." It's a bold and unexpected choice for a band that could choose to simply dazzle with their polished pop acumen, made even more daring by the fact that the Florida quartet was working with the prospect of needing their third release to strike while the commercial iron was hot.

Having spent the last five years building word-of-mouth buzz (at one point playing over 400 shows in the span of a year and a half) the band would have been foolish to endanger the momentum they've accumulated. With their lineup having solidified with Marsh (vocals/guitars/keyboards), Bryan Laurensen (guitars), James Likeness (bass), and Jonathan Bucklew (drums), their sophomore release, 2004's *In Motion* landed in the CD players of over 100,000 listeners and at the #1 slot on the Billboard Alternative New Artist Chart. They even went on to win Yahoo! Music's 2005 "Who's Next" competition, scrambling to the top of a dogfight between America's very best indie rock bands on the strength of their devoted fan base.

For most bands in such a position, the usual script calls for them to take their hard-earned accolades and make only incremental changes to placate their fans. Copeland ultimately refused to participate in that plot. "I pretty much knew going into it that some people are going to like it and some people aren't," Marsh admits, explaining a record that's more sonically challenging, more thematically varied, and more compositionally obtuse. "We didn't set out and say, 'Ok, we want to change this about our sound.' We just wanted not to be lazy and take every idea that we had and build it to its full potential. That meant doing lush orchestration with real players and not programmed strings or anything like that. We've never had real strings on a Copeland record," he beams. "I bought a vibraphone a month and a half before we went to record, and it shows up

on three songs. The biggest difference is the lack of rhythm guitar. When we did away with that, it freed us up to record a lot more interesting things, like vibraphone and music box." Put simply by Bucklew, "This is the biggest step that Copeland has ever taken in any one direction." Laurensen relates, "I've never been more proud of a record than I am of *Eat, Sleep, Repeat*. It is more honest and vulnerable like our first record, and yet it's, musically, a natural progression from our second record. It's the first Copeland release that, when I listen to it, I sometimes find myself singing along as if I were not a member of the band, but rather a listener."

The result is a different kind of indie pop album, one that's over-the-top in its melodic directness, yet retains its DIY craftsmanship. It's the sound of a band stretching itself, from the first moments of tinkling vibraphone, manipulated drums, and sighing strings that open the album ("Where's My Head") through soaring cautionary pop balladry ("Careful Now") and gnarled guitar lines that threaten to strangle airy choruses ("I'm a Sucker for a Kind Word"). No less clear is Marsh's maturation as a songwriter, whether contemplating the state of geopolitical unrest on "I'm Safer on an Airplane" or taking inspiration from an unlikely source for the lost love narrative of "The Last Time He Saw Dorie."

"That one was inspired by the movie *Stardust Memories*, a Woody Allen film," Marsh says of the song's tragicomic strains. "That film, in particular, I felt, had the same kind of spirit that I was writing from, so I thought it would be cool to put a little Woody Allen homage in there. I've studied his work a lot, and it's really hard to get a grasp on exactly where he stands on stuff, because his movies explore love and faithfulness, and being satisfied with life is something that plagues him and runs through all of his movies." In the end, it's an album that is as massive as it is immediate, as uncompromising as it is accessible, a sound big enough to fill a stadium but nuanced enough to require headphones. The final challenge for Copeland is likely to be how to retain their intimate relationship with their fans as their profile grows. If the careful dynamics of *Eat, Sleep, Repeat* are any indication, it's a challenge they're more than capable of meeting.

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