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INTERVIEW: FOALS

The noise surrounding Oxford band the Foals is growing almost as loud as their storming live sets. Maxine Gallagher meets Yannis, the driving force behind this energetic fivesome, to find out the secrets behind their rapid success. And what's with the tennis outfits?

Betraying his dark and broody appearance, Foals' singer Yannis begins by informing me that he likes to talk, "a lot". I set the recorder rolling and, true to his word, he doesn't stop talking for over half an hour. So much so that he is forced to take an untouched bottle of beer with him when he leaves.

This is one Foal with something to say.

He starts by taking on Oxford University. Two Foals (including him) made it into Oxford only to leave several months later to pursue a musical career. The other three also dropped out of university at the time. Yannis, who studied English literature for that brief time, peppers his speech with plenty of multi-syllabic words, but it's clear that a life of academia was not for him. He talks of the embarrassment of handing naive, badly written essays to highly knowledgeable dons and his despair with the type of pompous Oxford student that goes there just to use the name as a badge.



Still, that was then, this is now. Foals have come a long way in a very short time. In less than a year since they formed, they are happily signed to Transgressive, have flown over to industry talent show South by Southwest in Texas, have released their first single, Hummer, and are soon flying out to New York to record their first album with the producer of Yeah Yeah Yeahs.

You'd hate them if you didn't love them so much. Their music, while a bit too full of Atari beeps for my taste, is full of energy, catchy hooks and, if you could hear them through the constant guitar assaults, lyrics that are actually trying to say something. They are also famed for their pounding, frenzied live shows.

But don't make the mistake of calling them indie. "We would never describe ourselves as indie," I am firmly told when I dare to mention the word, "We're different to the other bands out there. We're trying to do something fresh that doesn't just set out to rehash music from ten years ago. Well, we might have a go at ripping some techno off, but translating that into guitars is something that not many other people are doing."

"I realise that if we're playing the rock circuit then people are going to call us indie," he concedes, "but one of the things I like about us is that we also play club nights and are collaborating with dance labels." Dance is a recurring theme in Foals' music and Yannis's words. Well techno to be more specific. They are all big techno fans and cite Steve Reich as a key inspiration. Most recently their sound is being described as Afrobeat, a description that flatters them, but that Yannis confesses he doesn't quite see. If it must have a label, he describes it as "autistic pop" and "thoughtfully stupid" – as in, clever enough not to be Westlife but dumb enough to not be Sting. Yannis also admits that he harbours desires to write soundtracks to, wait for it... ballets. This guy is full of surprises. When I ask does that mean going it alone, he gives a rare, face-opening grin and coyly mentions a massive ego that needs constant feeding.

For now though, Foals don't want to be neatly boxed and categorised. They are keen to retain creative control, which Yannis realises can be difficult to do in the cutthroat world of "industry schmoos".

