

“ERUDITE AS FUCK”

EZRA KOENIG: I always had a fairly pragmatic streak that made me not ever fully commit to the dream, which is an ongoing issue. I think it's important to always feel like you're doing music as a hobby because if you start looking at it as a job, you start making terrible decisions. I like the idea of it as a serious hobby, because if you start taking it for granted, that it's your job and you get to do it for a long time, you go on tour, and it's like, “Oh, nice, we came back to this city and the show got bigger, we got paid more money for that thing, our song was in that movie, I met this person,” it starts to feel effortless. And you forget that all of this cool stuff that happens to you is predicated on this weird, tumultuous, fickle creative energy that doesn't care about money or status. If you start to act like, “Yeah, I'm a musician, I'll be doing this in ten years,” I think that's poisonous.

IMRAN AHMED: You could say that the Arctic Monkeys formed a band because of the Vines, for example, but I never got the sense that Vampire Weekend formed a band because of the Strokes or anyone else. They definitely knew their music, they were definitely very passionate about music and very knowledgeable, but they didn't sign up to be guitar heroes.

JENNY ELISCU: Ezra, one of his principal gifts is being all-around erudite as fuck, you know? And that will serve him in everything he does for the rest of his very successful and interesting life, I'm sure. He's definitely no Julian, you know?

ALEX WAGNER: Come on. Ezra is not Julian, right? They are not the same, they are not battling the same demons. Constitutionally

they're different people. I mean, there's this very reasonable millennial idea of your art form as a fundamentally manageable thing. Like, you could go and be an artist, as opposed to you can't be anything but an artist and it's this all-encompassing demon you have to wrestle with. There's just a completely different attitude about the musical output between the generations. The millennials are more practically minded, for sure.

EZRA KOENIG: I thought I might major in evolutionary biology. I didn't know what I was going to do.

ROSTAM BATMANGLIJ: I pictured myself coming to New York and forming a band, but I didn't know exactly what that looked like.

CHRIS TOMSON: There was a weekend in the middle of the summer before classes started where there was this one-hour talk of all the kids that lived in the area that were going to Columbia. The shtick was you got a free copy of *The Odyssey*, which you were supposed to read over the summer. I don't remember this but Ezra remembers seeing me. He thought I seemed kind of chill, probably liked drugs, which I didn't and still don't. I did have longer hair.

EZRA KOENIG: Rostam and I knew people in common, and once we had our first real conversation, we were talking about making music.

ROSTAM BATMANGLIJ: The first time we hung out at a party, we talked about starting a band together, half-jokingly.

EZRA KOENIG: He told me his favorite band was Coldplay.

ROSTAM BATMANGLIJ: We used to IM each other MP3s of stuff.

EZRA KOENIG: He felt like he really didn't know what he was doing yet, musically.

ROSTAM BATMANGLIJ: Throughout college, I was recording these—I guess they were covers. They were just my version of a song by one of my favorite bands. One was a cover of Prince's "I Would Die 4 U," where I literally re-created every drum part, every synth part, and sang every vocal part, even the three-part harmony in the second verse. I was thinking about the ingredients that go into a recipe and how you cook them.

EZRA KOENIG: The stuff he'd play me would be very referential and would sound like the Strokes or Walkmen. But even then, I was

very impressed by his ability to zero in on the harmonic identity of these bands. Even though the stuff he was doing wasn't particularly original, there was something that impressed me about the fact that he wrote something that sounded a lot like a Walkmen song, because that's not something that anybody can just do. In the meantime, I was doing my own weird stuff.

CHRIS BAIO: I have a memory of Ezra, from when we were living together. I was in my room working on some stupid Russian lit paper and I remember hearing him, down the hall, blasting this one song on repeat. It was the first single on the last Destiny's Child record. Over and over and over again. He was listening to it and dissecting it.

EZRA KOENIG: I had a band all through high school, then I got to college and was like, "Fuck that, I'd rather just make beats on my computer and go rap." So I was mostly making these weird electro-y rap songs that I think were kind of good, maybe aside from the rapping.

IMRAN AHMED: Ezra was in a hip-hop duo called L'Homme Run. And I believe Chris Tomson was also playing with him.

EZRA KOENIG: One of our better songs was called "Bitches." It was this very poppy dancehall song, and Rostam helped me work on that. So already there was kind of an established way of working: I'd bring an idea to him, and he'd flesh it out and help record it.

CHRIS TOMSON: There's a [L'Homme Run song called] "Interracial Dating" where I played the guitar solo, and this was back when I was a little more of a shredder. I was told to make it sort of "Thriller"-ish, like a little bit Van Halen. There was some foreshadowing there.

EZRA KOENIG: Why bother to play actual instruments? Why not just make everything on the computer?

CHRIS TOMSON: I think Ezra realized the limitations of the L'Homme Run setup.

EZRA KOENIG: Because I liked the idea of having more power when I performed live, having an actual drum set, feeling a sense of stability. I liked the songs we were writing, but just being up there with a microphone and an iPod felt weak. I felt a little powerless. Also,

there were these other ideas of preppiness or whatever. We all really wanted to play this really preppy coed society house at Columbia. They would have these fancy parties and there was something romantic about that to us. I envisioned this Elvis Costello/Squeeze vibe, this real smart, punky energy that was preppy. That was my vision. So, yeah, I started to like the idea of having a band again, and Rostam had always been interested in having a band.

CHRIS BAIO: Their senior year, my junior year, they were talking about starting a band that was more like a rock band. We'd be at parties and they'd kinda talk like, "Would you be interested in playing?" I was officially asked at some party in maybe January 2006. I think a friend was DJing at Ding Dong Lounge, which is a bar on 106 and Columbus. We were sitting at a table and Ezra said, "So do you want to be in Vampire Weekend?"

ANDY GREENWALD: I wrote Vampire Weekend's first *Spin* cover story and I just could not fucking wrap my head around them. They didn't make sense because they didn't come from the same world and they didn't play by any rules. I realized that I had been locked into a prehistoric mind-set, basically, because I went in being like, "Who are you preppy twerps to do this?" Now, that's totally hypocritical because I liked mixing up genres and felt a deep affinity to hip-hop. So look at me. But for some reason, when they did it, it was "Tut tut tut," like I was some kind of old-world gatekeeper. I could not crack them. Ezra is uncrackable. I literally was like, "Who are you to do a rap song? You white Jew who went to an Ivy League school." As opposed to me, right? But he was allowed to do it because everyone was always allowed to do it. It was just a different mind-set, and it was just because of a few years' age difference where he grew up downloading everything and he never felt allegiance to anything and could easily move between genres and just pick the parts he wanted and it was fine.

EZRA KOENIG: By the time we started Vampire Weekend, it's not like we were just picking up instruments, like, "Let's start a band." It was like, "Let's start a preppy band and make the guitars have this Johnny Marr African tone." We already had some pretty strong ideas going.

CHRIS TOMSON: February sixth of '06 was the first practice. Ezra sent out e-mails: "Hey, you know, when we meet up we can practice a few songs, see if we can figure something out." It was a Monday night and we had to finish by eight forty-five because Baio wanted to get back to his dorm to watch *24*. He was really into *24*.