



## Good to be the King

Eugene's Justin King sets up for success.

**J**ustin King is an accomplished singer/songwriter, acoustic guitarist and sound engineer at his own Blackberry Hill recording studio. Now, he and his band are preparing for the next level, as Universal Records courts them.

King has long been a popular solo performer, having played nine dates on a national tour with James Taylor and an entire summer tour with Diana Krall. He has performed on the same bills with B. B. King, North Mississippi All Stars, Willy Porter and Al Green. While he happily plays the large venues, he's seen his share of small clubs and bars across the nation, and his years of hard work are paying off.

"I started out writing songs," says King. "I didn't start out as an instrumentalist. Within the last year I put a band together to play a lot of songs I've been writing. The solo stuff is kind of half songwriting and half acoustic guitar stuff," he continues, while describing his band's work as "U2-ish, Death Cab For Cutie-ish, kind of a mix between an 'indie' sound and Coldplay-ish stuff."

His musical comrades are drummer Ehren Ebbage, guitarist James West and bassist Drew Dresman, who King has been playing with since the age of 15.

King notes that he is known for a unique style of playing that's based on tapping. "It's a very percussive style where you play on the neck with both hands fretting the notes. It's not like one hand strumming and one hand chording. It's both hands chording." King has merged that style into his band's stage presence, and since the band has taken root they've played two months of bi-coastal shows: March in New York and September in Los Angeles.

One year prior, a Universal employee saw a solo King show at The Knitting Factory in New York City. That employee's co-worker is the brother of the owner of Larrivee guitars, the company King endorses. Thanks to that connection, Universal reps watched a show of King and his band, met with them the next day and gave them money to record a demo with one of Universal's producers, a project King

says turned out "decently."

Later, they recorded one by themselves at Blackberry, which King is more impressed with. King and drummer Ebbage also have an instrumental side project in the works with bassist Michael Manring and Dutch guitarist Carlos Vamos, who flew over to participate. The band will return to

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New York and the Northeast in November and Los Angeles in December "What we're doing basically is playing showcases for industry folks," Says King, "and since our first meeting with Universal we've had Capitol Records and Epic Records contact us, so we're flirting with the majors at the moment. We're just kind of playing it by ear, but we have a buzz going right now and we're trying to continue that by going out and getting in front of these people."

"And also," he continues, "we're just trying to build a good solid fan base." The band already has plans to live part of the year in New York, ("I have a deep, deep love for that place," says King) and part of the year in Eugene. If a deal does materialize, the band will base their touring operation out of New York and record in Eugene at Blackberry, which King will maintain via a manager and engineer while he's away.

In addition to stateside shows, the band will perform in Japan in January, buoyed by a Japanese distribution deal he inked for his acoustic guitar record, *Le Bleu*. Throughout all this excitement, King sustains a healthy outlook. "I've learned from this process over the last two to four years," he says, "that it's important to just keep sights on what you can do immediately. And what I can do immediately is continue to try to write good songs and work on the things I can affect. And the rest of it is something that just hopefully comes through!" **EW**

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