



AJA VOLKMAN (RIGHT) WITH NICO VEGA GUITARIST RICH KOEHLER (LEFT) AND DRUMMER DAN EPAND

GIRLS TALK

Aja Volkman of Nico Vega talks the *Girls* soundtrack, music licensing and growing up in Eugene

There's a certain bump that comes from being featured on the soundtrack for HBO cult favorite *Girls*. The show, about four twentysomethings stumbling through their lives in New York City, has featured new music by established pros like Belle and Sebastian, Santigold and Angel Haze, while also helping launch the careers of acts on the cusp of fame, such as Swedish duo Icona Pop, whose song "I Love It" became a smash hit after it was featured during a coke-fueled bender on the dramedy.

Next in line to get the *Girls* bump is a little closer to home. "I Believe (Get Over Yourself)" by Nico Vega — the alt-rock band led by Eugene native Aja Volkman — is the official song for the *Girls* season four trailer airing until the season premiere Jan. 11. As *Billboard* magazine puts it, "The choice of the L.A. trio Nico Vega's uplifting

"I Believe" to score the introduction to the new season will surely help to introduce a new audience to the band."

The feel-good self-deprecating anthem is perfect for the show, Volkman tells *EW* over the phone from her home outside Las Vegas (with husband Dan Reynolds, frontman for Imagine Dragons). "It's just so cute how it matches up with the song," Volkman says of the trailer, adding that the song is about "laughing at yourself."

The secret to nabbing such a coveted platform is licensing, she says. "In a way, I think licensing is the new radio for a lot of people that wouldn't be considered for radio," she says. "My band has been doing pretty well at licensing for the past couple years."

That's a bit of an understatement. In early 2013, the popular video game BioShock Infinite used the Nico Vega single "Beast" for its "Beast of America" trailer — and

the song went on to garner 5 million streaming listens and single sales. "Beast" was also featured in films *Jack Reacher* and *Pacific Rim*.

While "Beast" is thrashing, roaring rock, "I Believe," is decidedly lighter. So is the rest of *Lead to Light*, Nico Vega's sophomore studio album released July 2014, especially when compared to 2009's *Nico Vega*.

"Our past album was really heavy," Volkman says. "It was just kind of emoting everything we were as a band. It was never able to fit into a category, which actually made it really hard to market. I love that record. I thought it would be really hard to top that record for me."

Lead to Light is different. "It is a pop record," she says. "We wanted to all make a career and living of the band. We have to be really smart with this and how to market it, but we also wanted something that we're proud of."

Volkman's roots, musically and otherwise, are in Eugene, where she lived until 2003. Her parents are local artists Rogene Manas and James Volkman. "I had parents who were very encouraging of whatever I felt was my calling in life," she says. "I actually grew up with a lot of people who went on to pursue a career in music."

Two of those people, Theresa Wayman and Emily Kokal, are in indie-rock favorite Warpaint. "Theresa, I met her when I was eight," she notes. "We became really close. We were best friends."

She also mentions Eugenean Mat Kearny — now well known for the success of his hip-hop and folk debut *Nothing Left to Lose* — and, of course, South Eugene High School. "We got into a lot of trouble in high school. It took me a long time to get my act together."

To get her act together, Volkman moved to L.A. in 2003. "When I moved to L.A. finally, it took me sometime to get out of that self-deprecating reality," she says. "I've always loved making music, and I loved writing. I was either going to live in a basement or I was really going to pursue it."

Nico Vega was formed in 2004, led by her earth-rattling vocals and later joined by the crunchy guitar of Rich Koehler and the gritty drums of Dan Epand.

When asked if Nico Vega will stop in Eugene while touring for *Lead to Light*, Volkman pauses. "The last time we played there the only people who showed up was our immediate family," she says, laughing. Volkman asked Warpaint about coming home too, and she says they responded, "We don't have an audience in Eugene either."

Regardless, Volkman says she hopes Nico Vega will have a chance to play in Eugene soon. In the meantime, check out the trailer for *Girls* at wklw.ws/1uh. ■



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