

Arts & Entertainment

ACADEMY OF ART UNIVERSITY AND ACADEMYART.EDU | August 2013 volume 1



Collaboration is key on Gavin DeGraw's "Best I Ever Had"



By Kirsten Coachman

Things are about to get even sweeter for singer-songwriter Gavin DeGraw. He recently released his new single, "Best I Ever Had," which is an upbeat, foot-stompin' good time that is drawing comparisons to the likes of Mumford and Sons and Of Monsters and Men. The song is the first single released off of the multi-platinum recording artist's upcoming fifth studio album, "Make A Move," which is due to be released in late September.

DeGraw hit the road last month as part of Train's "Mermaids Of Alcatraz Tour" along with The Script. Before his recent show in Indianapolis, Ind., I had an opportunity to talk with the singer-songwriter about the origin of his burgeoning hit, "Best I Ever Had," his experience collaborating once again with multiple songwriters and what he's looking forward to about performing in the city this weekend.

Q: You have this fantastic new single, "Best I Ever

Had," out now, which is a bit of a different sound for you. How did this song come about?

A: Thank you very much, first of all, and I had gotten together in Nashville with a writer who I'm friendly with, a writer and singer named Martin Johnson. He had come from a pop-punk group called Boys Like Girls. Good dude and a talented guy. We met up a place called Blackbird Studios, which is John and Martina McBride's studio. Martin and I wrote a song together called "Everything Will Change," this really beautiful, kind of inspirational ballad.

We had a good time and a couple months later, I was out in Los Angeles and I was like, "Hey man, love that thing we wrote. Let's get in a studio and do another one." He was like, "Great, come on over." So, we hit a place called Conway Studios in L.A., which is another great studio. We got in a room and he started playing some jingle jangle-y kind of acoustic guitar rhythm, some

drum beat, and I was like, "Alright, cool. I can do that." And I started singing, "Melt Antarctica, savin' Africa, I failed Algebra," and he goes, "And I miss you sometimes." I said, "Yeah, alright, cool." [laughs]

So right away, our approach to the song, which was going to be all these little tidbits of information about the person then getting back to the person of interest, you know, in your mind. There's sort of a Kerouac approach of divulging all this info, all these things that are on your mind - things socially that you notice, these things that you've done, then getting back to your personal life. And that was the approach of the song. And at the end of it, we finished it up and we were like, "Oh my God, that was a lot of fun!"

Of course, we played it for the label, they went nuts and we were really stoked. We thought that was a really good moment, a really good moment right now as far as the landscape of the music scene, which is very, very wide open. They're accepting

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Gavin DeGraw, on creative collaboration

a lot of styles right now, you know, for commercial music. We thought it was a really good opportunity to use this openness to the Americana music style that's been on the radio and see what happens and if it will work for us as well. That's what we did.

Q: The song is really catchy and has some interesting lyrics. In particular, you have a line that says, "I'm looking at the crowd and they're staring at their phones." What's kind of the reaction to this specific lyric?

A: [laughs] Well, you know what, it's just a description of pop culture, where we're at. Not just pop culture, just our culture. It's one of those things where you can judge it or not judge it. Either way, it doesn't matter. You're just painting the landscape, the reality is the phone is now our connection to our entire social scene.

People don't want to carry a camera most of the time and they've got their phone on them. The phone has a camera. Everyone has a little element of James Bond on

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CITY LIFE

Co-writers have “multi-dimensional effect” on DeGraw’s latest album

writing with another artist, therefore your audience is bigger,” because there’s never a guarantee on that, but there is nearly a guarantee when you’re writing with another writer that you really respect that you’re going to be expanding artistically.

Q: And that’s something you started doing on your last record (2011’s “Sweet-er”) was work with other writers...

A: Exactly. On half of that record, well, 40 percent of it, I wrote with another person. I wrote two with Ryan Tedder (OneRepublic) and two with Andrew Frampton. But, this record, I decided I would get together with different writers all along the way. I think that’s a good thing, I think it made the album much more varied and I also think it helped me get it done

a whole lot more efficiently, a whole lot faster and a quality that I’m proud of than if I had done it on my own. It really gives me another perspective as a writer and as an artist. When you’re in a room

with someone’s idea and someone’s opinion, I think it’s a really important thing for other writers to try.

I was very much opposed to it when I first started recording, you know, when I first started this whole journey of mine. As an artist, it’s the best thing I could have done. It really just opened up my mind.

Q: Like you mentioned earlier, you’re on the road with Train and The Script – how has the tour been so far and what’s the crowd reaction been like?

A: The tour, honestly I think it’s the absolute perfect tour right now for the timing of the release of my single and with the upcoming album, “Make A Move,” coming out in late September, the tour is coming at the absolute most perfect time. [Train and The Script], musically and personally, I just really like them all.

So the tour itself, as far as the audience is concerned,

I think they are feeling that. I think they are really reading the relationship that we all have back here backstage, because we’re taking it onstage.

It doesn’t feel like we’re performing for three tribes of audiences out there. It doesn’t feel like, “Okay, those are Train’s people, those are Gavin’s people and those are The Script’s people.” I think that the people coming out here, although I think they all love Train and they all love The Script, I think that there’s a real community vibe out there. People aren’t going, “Oh, I came for this band, so I’m not going to enjoy this other band that’s out there right now.” And I think that’s a really important element to this tour and it’s making it very special. I think it really helps each artist who’s out there have an even better show than they had expected.

And I’ve never seen a headliner more generous with their stage than Train and Pat Monahan. The fact that they’re bringing Ashley Monroe onstage, who sings a duet with them, bringing me out onstage with them and Danny from The Script and some of the other guys from The Script out there to perform at the end of the night as part of the encore. I mean, it’s an unbelievable moment. Anybody opening for a headliner would be beside themselves for the opportunity to be welcomed with open arms in that way. I think they’re doing an amazing job at making us all feel so, so welcome and so invited. It’s pretty amazing.

Q: You’re going to be here in San Francisco on August 11 at the America’s Cup Pavilion. What are you looking forward to about that show and being in the city again?

A: Oh, man. Well, I happen to love San Francisco. [It] has a little special place in my heart, because it’s the first region in the U.S. to break my first record.

Great food, amazing people, great music scene. I’m looking forward to a few things. I like your multidimensional weather. [laughs] It’s amazing. It’s a beautiful place.

Gavin DeGraw will be performing at the new America’s Cup Pavilion on Sunday, August 11, alongside Train and The Script during the San

Francisco stop of the “Mermaids Of Alcatraz Tour.” Time: 7 p.m. Cost: \$39.50 - \$79.50

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MUSIC

OUTSIDE LANDS

It’s that lovely time of the summer where Golden Gate Park gets invaded for love of music and a good time at the one and only Outside Lands.

To get you hyped for your big three-day weekend of musical bliss, members of the Academy of Art University newspaper staff have each highlighted five artists (and their favorite songs!) that they recommend you check out during the festival.

Kirsten Coachman recommends:

- » **Paul McCartney** - "Get Back"
- » **Zedd** - "Clarity" feat. Foxes
- » **Midi Matilda** - "Day Dreams" and "Love & the Movies"
- » **Atlas Genius** - "If So" and "So Electric"
- » **Emeli Sandé** - "Next to Me"



Shou June Lin recommends:

- » **Chromatics** - "Tick of the Clock"
- » **Kaskade** - "4 AM" and "Atmosphere"
- » **Pretty Lights** - "Finally Moving"
- » **Yeah Yeah Yeahs** - "Heads Will Roll" and "Maps"
- » **Phoenix** - "1901" and "Lisztomania"

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their pocket, you know what I mean? They can either a. spy on somebody or b. document their own life, they’re going to take the opportunity to do it. It’s a really fascinating thing.

Q: What kind of goes through your mind when you see this happening at your shows?

A: What I think is, the show’s better right now with your own eyes than it is just with the screen of your phone. But at the same time, the reality is, as an artist, you know that the fact that they’re recording it is also a very important thing for every artist to understand that they’re documenting [your performance] and they’re posting it and they’re promoting you. And so, it’s actually a great thing. It’s actually a very fascinating thing. You have to take both elements in that regard, and go, “Okay, well, yes, they’ve got their phones up, maybe it affects them going crazy, because they can’t swing their arms around and anything you might want to at this moment,” you know? But at the same time, they’re actually making this concert way bigger than it could have been just at this one space that we’re at, because where we are right now, the show is just a vacuum. But with their phones connected to the world make the show bigger than you could ever make it on your own.

Q: You’ve said that “Best I Ever Had” is not indicative of what the rest of your upcoming album is going to sound like. So what other types of musical flavors can fans expect on your album?

A: Well, you know, in a lot of ways, the kind of music Train makes and the kind of music The Script makes, the bands that we’re out on tour with right now, they’re very representative in the approach of the type of music that I

make. That’s why I think this is such a perfect tour for me, at the moment.

Guys like that, Maroon 5, there’s elements of that where there is pop sensibility. We have very melodic music, and we all really take the lyrics sometimes very seriously, sometimes just for fun, but we all really care about our craft as writers and about our connection to our fans. We really care about the quality of our singing and things like that. We want to go out there and give them the best performance that we can everyday. Regardless of the right show, regardless of the number of people out there, we always want to give our best personal musical performance.

The style of music that I’m making is – there’s a level of diversity with a level of continuity and that, of course, I’m a writer on every song, so of course, there’s going to be some common element there, as far as style is concerned. At the same time, there’s other styles being injected into it, because I included a different writer on every song on this whole album. I included another personality, I think it really adds to the multidimensional effect of the music.

What happened was when I was writing all the music by myself, I felt like maybe I wasn’t making things interesting enough after awhile. I felt like I had exercised almost all of my options, personally, with the amount of style by it and influence by it. So when I got together with another writer or put another writer in the room and hung out with them or another couple writers, it really expanded my reach as an artist, for me personally, artistically. Not necessarily, “Oh, well, you’re

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Gavin DeGraw, on being at America’s Cup on August 11