

# The Grey Race

Jon Darling: vocals, guitar

Jeff Hill: bass

Ethan Eubanks: drums

“I don’t really like the norm – I get a kick out of things that are a little messed up,” says Jon Darling, singer, songwriter and guitarist for The Grey Race. “Leaving the cracks and creases in, the imperfections, is attractive to me.” And who would expect anything less from a singer who, on his New York band’s eponymous debut album (due in September 2007 on Unfiltered Records) sings: You see it’s easy without the pain/ And twice as boring/ Mix it up/ And keep the blood flowing/ You know you can.

Jon says of his collaboration with bassist Jeff Hill and drummer Ethan Eubanks, the pair he credits with designing The Grey Race’s sonic architecture: “We’ve got this sweet-and-sour thing going on. My stuff is pretty dark and moody, but Ethan and Jeff’s production brought a completely new dimension to it.” An unsettling lyric like Remember to turn the blade full circle, for instance, now swirls pleasantly atop an intoxicating waltz in “Straight For the Middle.” With Ethan and Jeff’s discovery of Jon’s treasure trove of songs, a lightning bolt struck the songwriter’s creative norm.

“We loved Jon’s voice and envisioned this whole sound around him,” Ethan says. “We wanted to see what that voice could do if you put it right up front and arranged all the other musical elements strictly to complement it.” That entailed letting Jon’s acoustic playing take the lead and not relying on electric guitar to carry the songs. Confides Jon, who taught himself to play bar chords with a distortion pedal via Metallica, Megadeth, Slayer and Sepultura, “I have to admit that at first the production freaked me out. It wasn’t heavy. It was a brand new sound for me. But Ethan and Jeff’s instincts were right on, and now I can’t imagine these songs any other way.”

Jon’s own musical instincts were developed as a lad growing up in New Plymouth, New Zealand. He stumbled onto songwriting after learning The Cure’s “10:15 on a Saturday Night.” “I figured out how to play it, and I was blown away,” he recalls. Ethan hails from the San Francisco bay area and has spent the last 10 years recording and performing with many singer songwriters and bands including Ivy, where he met Andy Chase, who mixed the record and EP and ultimately signed them to his label. Jeff Hill, who was raised in New York tri state area, is one of New York cities most respected bass players and he has shared the stage with many greats including a long standing stint with Rufus Wainwright both in the studio and his touring band.

The songs populating the Grey Race CD and EP (slated for a summer 2007 release) were recorded with a little drum set, a ProTools rig, a Mac, and a few basic

microphones in Jeff's bedroom in Brooklyn, NY. Friends (including Tracy Bonham, for whom Jon plays guitar) and family (Julia Darling, Jon's singer-songwriter sister) were called in to lend backup vocals, keyboards, vibes and strings, all contributing to a richly textured, deeply atmospheric sound that belies its humble origins.

"The process of making this record was so great," Ethan attests. "We were doing it for the love of it." Without a record deal, says Jeff: "There was really no purpose except trying to make some cool music. And we didn't labor over it." The resulting EP (boasting a brilliant cover of The Zombies "Care of Cell 44") and full-length debut are windows into the particular way Jon seems to have lived his life since leaving New Zealand for America. Certain themes emerge, however. Album standouts "Goodbye to You," "The Johnsons" and "The Stop Inside Your Start" limn the pitfalls of too much of a good thing. Jon notes of the latter, "That's a reminder to myself of how excited about life and excessive I get, and how I tend to jump the gun on things like drinking and partying. The best lesson for me to learn is to stop before it starts."

The lovely "Through Your Eyes" finds Jon thinking wistfully of an old girlfriend. "Taking It on the Chin" suggests his ambivalence about fronting a band, an issue that has receded of late. "I feel comfortable performing with The Grey Race," he reveals. "It's a nice little unit, a real collective. It makes me feel at home." "Try Not to Think" is about songwriting itself. "The standard format of songwriting doesn't appeal to me," Jon opines. "I'd rather just try to let something flow freely from my mind into the song."

In fact, The Grey Race has not been run on a straight line; it twists and turns through unexpected tributaries. It is alternately muscular and delicate, melancholy and amused, pop and something decidedly uncharted. "I think this sound is quite different from a lot of stuff that's happening in music now," Jon ventures. "I couldn't begin to say what bandwagon it would jump on. But I find that interesting – I think that's exactly why people should give it a listen."