



Kodaline

That Kodaline are ready to release their second album has still to sink in with the men who made it. The Dublin quartet didn't plan to follow up last year's 350,000-selling *In A Perfect World* so promptly. In fact, they didn't plan at all. Sparked by an experiment that inspired them to shake up their sound, the band started recording and couldn't stop. Just eight weeks later, *Coming Up For Air* was complete.

"If you'd told us at the start of the summer that we'd be finished our album by autumn we wouldn't have believed you," says singer Steve Garrigan. "It happened so quickly. A lot of the songs were done live in the studio, on the spot."

Kodaline were still on tour in support of their debut – which went Top 3 in Britain, spent nine weeks at No.1 in their native Ireland and made inroads in Europe and the States – when they received an invitation to spend a week in L.A. with producer Jackknife Lee.

"We didn't regard it as an album session," insists guitarist Mark Prendergast. "We thought we'd have some fun and see what happened. Jackknife is Irish and his track record is unbelievable. We weren't about to turn that down."

What Kodaline didn't expect was to leave L.A. with an entirely new approach to making music, an affection for synths and their second album's epic first single, *Honest*, already written.

"Jackknife opened our eyes to different ways of working," explains bassist Jason Boland. "He gave us a lesson in experimentation. The way he records is amazing. He has everything in the studio turned on, synths all over the place, instruments everywhere. If you want to play something, you pick it up."

"He asked if we felt out of our comfort zone," continues drummer Vinny May. "Yes? Then you're on the right track. We didn't set out to make any electronic music. We've always had synths in the studio; this time, we chose to use them. We put strange sounds in places we weren't sure would work, then listened back a day later and discovered they were key to the song."

Back in Britain, as soon as festival season finished, an inspired Kodaline set to work on the album they were itching to make. Electronics played a key part, adding depth, new dimensions and a harder edge to the band's trademark soaring choruses and widescreen sound.

There were sessions in Surrey, Dublin and Longford (“A place in the Irish countryside where there’s nothing to do but make music”) with Jim Eliot (Ellie Goulding) and In A Perfect World producer Steve Harris. There was a second week in L.A. with Jacknife Lee (Snow Patrol, R.E.M., Taylor Swift). Some songs were written and recorded in a matter of hours; on others, five days were spent on “fiddly bits”.

As on Kodamine’s debut, Steve wrote the bulk of the lyrics, but everyone pitched in. Autopilot was begun by Mark and Jason in a hotel room on a day off. “We banged cups and saucers together to make the rhythm and recorded it on a laptop,” recalls Mark. “We remade it, properly, in the studio with whatever sounds were around. That’s one of the songs that features a spray can.”

The achingly beautiful Unclear boasts harp and accordion as well as a wicker basket and Kodamine hitting half-drunk Coke cans with Sharpies. On choruses, all four often sang, multi-tracking their voices to sound like a choir. Unclear, however, demanded the real deal. Step forward the Downs Malvern Choir, school kids aged between 3 and 13, whose backing stunned the band.

Ambition abounds on Coming Up For Air. You can hear it in the range and emotion in Steve’s spellbinding vocals; in songs that hide hooks in unexpected places; in those hard-to-put-your-finger-on sounds that sometimes skulk in the background, sometimes take centre stage. It’s in the blueprint of an album that refuses to conform to a pattern, in the band’s determination to not repeat themselves and in the obsessive attention to detail.

Coming Up For Air’s sense of adventure stems from its lack of planning. Nothing was set in stone. Every song dictated its own direction. When Play The Game suggested a gospel singer, it got one (Christina Matovu). When the gorgeous, acoustic guitar-backed Better called out for strings, they come courtesy of an orchestra in Prague.

That same string section appears on lighters-aloft, soon-to-be couples anthem The One, the album’s second single, originally written for the wedding of Kodamine’s engineer Phil Magee, who hails from Swords, the same Dublin suburb as the band.

“Like an idiot, I left writing it until the night before,” recalls Steve. “Singing it the next day was the scariest thing I’ve ever done, much more nerve-wracking than standing in front a festival crowd. We all had a few beers before we played it, to ease the tension, obviously.”

The One wasn't intended to be heard again, but one night on tour in Toronto, the band agreed to let a fan up on stage to propose to his girlfriend and decided to dust down the song. When fan footage of the performance started spreading on YouTube, it was obvious they had to record it. For years to come, The One is set to soundtrack countless first dances.

What hasn't changed since the four friends from Swords became famous is the emotional power of their music and the connection it commands with fans. It's why Kodaline broke out of Ireland before they'd ever set foot overseas, when the video for All I Want, the title track of their 2012 debut EP, took off on YouTube.

First licensed by Grey's Anatomy, All I Want recently appeared on the soundtrack of box-office smash The Fault In Our Stars (the book's best-selling author John Greene is a big fan of the band.) Other songs from In A Perfect World continue to crop up on soundtracks – Pray currently appears on the trailer for Horns, starring Daniel Radcliffe and both Perfect World and Brand New Day appear on Gogglebox every week!

Coming Up For Air may be a sonic step on, but at its core remains Kodaline's ability to connect instantly with an audience, to share the emotions in their songs and to pull the listener in to their world. It's a smart, sharp, sophisticated album, by a band only just discovering what they're capable of.