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PLUGGED IN: KING TUFF

Written by [Mike Duffy](#) on September 4, 2012

When one listens to King Tuff's eponymous sophomore album, it's easy to guess that the current Los Angeles resident had his heart pulled in the direction of the beach and Pacific Coast Highway.

Oddly enough, however, King Tuff — nee Kyle Thomas — wrote the entire thing in his native Vermont. In the winter. By himself in an art space.

Throw in the fact that it was recorded in an abandoned high school in Detroit — more on that later — and *King Tuff* seems like quite the amalgamation.

Really, it is a collection of 13 garage-pop tracks that would be at home in the CD player — or iPhone connection — of a convertible driving through the winding La La Land streets.

"When it was written, I was spending a lot of time by myself in my art studio and just started writing a ton of songs," Thomas told Fender.

"I think people just associate catchy pop music with summertime and the beach and stuff, but that's pretty much all that is."

And what about recording with Bobby Harlow (The Cut, The Go) in the Motor City? Having met at the Burger Records showcase at the South by Southwest music festival this past year, the two eventually decamped to the abandoned halls of Malcolm X High School.

Understandably, there were a few stories to come out of a building rumored to be haunted.

“It’s like anything in life. Influence is being somewhere. I have no idea what my songs are going to sound like now.” »

“We kept going to the second floor, which is where they told us not to go,” he said. “Me and the producer kept going into this one room that had a really weird vibe in it. At one point, he thought he was sinking through the floor, and we ran the hell out of there.”

It’s undeniable that Thomas’ second release following 2008’s *Was Dead* has really picked up steam now that he’s moved to Los Angeles, however.

He’s already played the Johnny Rad Fest in San Diego and the FYF Fest in L.A., performing catchy tracks like “Keep On Movin’” and “Bad Thing” from *King Tuff* to enthusiastic, sing-along crowds.

“That’s why I moved – just to be more connected to that,” Thomas said. “In Vermont, there’s not really anywhere to play. There are some other great musicians, but it’s just easier to be in a big city because you get more opportunities.

“In some ways, it’s really distracting, but it’s good.”

A great look into the L.A. lifestyle is Thomas’ video for “Alone and Stoned,” where he invades the bedrooms of local bands with whom he is friendly, like Hunx and His Punx and Shannon and the Clams, to see what they do in their spare time.

The title of the song provided an appropriate description for the shoot.

“It was just a lot of people in their own element,” he said. “It was really cool going to a bunch of people’s houses every day to see how people’s bedrooms are different. You get to be a peeping Tom in there. Everyone likes to spy, right?”

On the horizon is a European tour in September until Thomas comes back to North America and runs through Canada and the States until mid-November. He also has about 40 demos in the hopper, although he said he desires to just continue to write new material and release the superfluous recordings at his leisure.

For his part, Thomas is keeping things in perspective.

“I’ve never done this much touring. I’ve done quite a bit of two-week tours here and there over the years, but nothing like this,” he said.

“It feels really good, but I try not to think about it too much.”



King Tuff is hardly Thomas’ only project. He played in glam-rock trio Happy Birthday with Ruth Garbus, who is the sister of tUnE-yArDs’ Merrill Garbus, and with sludge-rockers Witch alongside Dinosaur Jr.’s J Mascis on drums.

By working with such an indie legend as Mascis, Thomas said he couldn’t help but learn a few things, even if the two didn’t really write much material together.

“He just played the drums on them, but it was definitely awesome,” Thomas said. “He’s a sick drummer. I just saw Dinosaur Jr. a few days ago, and they just killed it. It’s like he’s in a cubicle made of Marshalls. And then he has another amp directly at a high level that is just blasting at his face.”

Regardless, King Tuff is Thomas’ main gig now and moving forward.

“This is the one I’m focusing on,” he said of King Tuff (a play on his initials that he thought of in high school). “I’m not going to say that those other ones are not going to get together again, because we could still record together. But this is my main focus.”

Still, could Thomas’ songwriting prowess be corrupted by the bright lights of Los Angeles now that he’s out of the proverbial woods?



“It’s hard to tell yet, because I haven’t written many songs since I’ve been there,” he said. “Inevitably, some part of that will influence me. It’s like anything in life. Influence is being somewhere. I have no idea what my songs are going to sound like now.”

“It’s probably going to sound more like Miley [Cyrus],” he added barely able to suppress a laugh. “I was just daydreaming the other night about writing about Lady Gaga. I think that would be tight. I think that could work.”

Who knows? It just might.

For more information, visit King Tuff’s [official Facebook page](#).



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