



L-R:
 Matt Hayward (drums), Emma
 Richardson (bass, vocals), Russell
 Marsden (guitar, vocals)

Beneath the Skin

THE UK'S BUZZED-ABOUT BAND OF SKULLS ENJOY THE STEADY CLIMB.

On the surface, it might seem like Band of Skulls is enjoying a kind of whirlwind success — and to some extent, they are. In the year since the British trio's debut album, *Baby Darling Doll Face Honey*, came out, the band has appeared at Lollapalooza, SXSW and Coachella, played on *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*, made iTunes Pick of the Week and appeared on the *Twilight: New Moon* soundtrack, which has given them quite a boost.

At the end of it all, though, the band is still in a van, still using minimal equipment and playing the club circuit. Their level of success has been manageable, and their low-key demeanor is still intact. This is partially due to their long-standing relationships. Singer/guitarist Russell Marsden and drummer Matt Hayward have been friends since childhood and according to them, they got into the idea of playing music because they weren't good at anything else. Singer/bassist/artist Emma Richardson has been playing with the two since college. The band actually formed several years ago under the name Fleeing New York, but by the time they became Band of Skulls, the rest happened quickly. They signed to a "collective" of three companies, and the band is considered the fourth partner, giving them the freedom and control most new bands don't get.

One of their ideas was to release the album digitally months before the physical album was available. While this would be a scary prospect to some groups, Band of Skulls embraced it. Richardson felt that as soon as people heard the music, it should be available.

She explains, "It's good to have it available online immediately. People seem to need things instantly now, so if they hear the record and want to buy it, it's instant. I think there will always be a market for people to buy vinyl albums, though."

Marsden agrees and adds, "There's an argument when you're a band coming out that people sharing your music in any sense is probably initially really good for you. Even if there's only a few grainy YouTube videos, it helps to spread the word. Giving away a free song sometimes means

they'll buy the record or go to a show, anyway."

So far, the idea has paid off. Crowds have flocked to their opening sets with Black Rebel Motorcycle Club and The Whigs, and the response has been overwhelmingly positive. Richardson smiles and says, "We love it. We got a good response from the first time we came out here [to America]. People have been open-minded and willing to check us out."

In their time on the road, which currently finds them in Europe, the band has already been working on songs for the second record, and Richardson continues to draw every day. Having designed the band's album art and the art on their website, she shrugs at the notion that it would go beyond that at this point, saying it was "good to just keep it in-house." Marsden laughs and says, "Whenever she's bored of us, she'll go and draw, but it's probably just to keep the peace for all of our own good. Now we need to find a pastime."

Noticing a group of young people milling around nearby, the band is reminded that they are lucky to be where they are — and doing it on their own terms. Although the *Twilight* aspect has brought out a slightly younger crowd than the group had been accustomed to, the group is happy with that as long as they don't have to deal with the similar hysteria that seems to surround every other aspect of the franchise. Marsden laughs and says, "It was good to have been involved indirectly. We did a few things when the movie came out, and to see the sort of things the actors have to go through was an eye-opener. It was a whirlwind of craziness. We're too laid-back for that."

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