



LVVRS

Hangin' With
JUSTIN MORRIS

I love a good mystery. I like an idea that creeps into the back of one's mind and makes him want to know more. In an age of instant information, those little curiosities seem to come much fewer and farther in between.

One such curiosity found its way to me this summer in the form of a video that cropped up on my Facebook feed. It was of a young trio of guys doing a cover of Fleetwood Mac's "Dreams." I figured it was the next "viral cover" making its way around the interwebs. Beautifully shot and produced, the video made an impressive backdrop to the well-made and catchy version of the classic hit and triggered enough curiosity to inspire me to click on through and find out more about who and what was behind it.

The trio was called Lvvr's and they're from right here in South Louisiana.

Now, I am by no means all-knowing about the local musical and cultural scene. But I do like to think I keep my finger on the pulse well enough to serve you all dutifully in the confines of these pages. The fact that this was a new name to me was somewhat surprising. A little investigation turned up no sign of a gig played or posted — just that video and one other, a lyric video for the song "Wild Heart" posted last May. The production quality in this video was no less impressive than that of the full-scale, professionally made video that brought me to look this far. I got the impression this act was a little something "more" ... even though there was no evident trace of them before



the spring.

My intentions to dig deeper got displaced by the day to day. But the notion made its way back around in time, and did so in a way I hadn't anticipated.

Pronounced "lovers," Lvvr's is comprised of singer/songwriter/guitarist River Gibson, his longtime collaborator and drummer Brennon Wilson and guitarist/bassist Zac Lyons, who wanted to talk about the band. It seemed the perfect way to get those long overdue questions answered. So we set up a time and a place to meet.

The room smelled of pipe tobacco. I was nursing a neat pour of Colorado whiskey when Lyons walked in in an unassuming manner. Far from a rock star who brandished both guitar and bass, he was now just an ordinary guy walking into a local lounge in the Lake City. We spotted each other quickly, sat down and started to unravel the mystery that, thus far, has been Lvvr's.

Zac Lyons: It's a funny story, because River and I had only met once prior to this band coming together. I was in a band that was actually pretty big around

here called O'Rhien that did some arena shows with P.O.D and Trapped. Then River was in a band called Tandem that did awesome along the Gulf Coast. And we did a show together and that's how we met. We actually didn't talk for a while after that. [Then] I got a phone call out of the blue from him after I'd actually quit playing music. I wasn't playing at all. I was working in the plants. I'd given it up after trying for so long. He was like, "Man, I would really like it if we could work together and see how this goes." So, he sent me some demos and I just loved it. I had dinner with him; we went and jammed; and it was like the first time just clicked; it just felt good. It was awesome.

River called me in November of last year; we launched the band officially on Valentine's Day this year. So, we're right about the six-month mark now. The planning stage has been a while, [and] we're really just getting the ball rolling; just now gigging. Played our first show in August in Austin, and we just played Florida a few weeks ago.

Justin Morris: So, was it predisposed from jump street that you were not going to gig at least for a while?

ZL: Oh yeah, absolutely. I mean, we don't want to play bars, and if you look at the shows we've played, they're all in 700 capacity venues or bigger. So there's just no reason to. You know, I was in the plants working. I'm not going to quit my job to come play for \$50 at a bar. I'm just too old for that. We all are. It's fun, it's great; I love playing guitar, and I love playing music ... but I can do it in my bedroom if I wanted to do that.

I want to tour the world and the only way to do that is to build a legitimate fan base. The only way to build a fan base is to make people realize that you're something special. And I think that we do have something special. We're an awesome band if you come see us live. You can ask anybody that's seen us; it's a really good show. But we have to keep portraying ourselves that way; otherwise people are going to associate you with what they see you doing.

JM: Well, sonically, what are you doing?

ZL: Well, what we like to tell people is we make pop music, but we do it with organic rock and roll instruments. Every sound that you hear is a real sound. We're all rock and roll at heart.

I used to play in a metal band. River's been rock and roll from the start. The dude's a freaking rock star. You just look at him and talk to him and you know he's a rock star. Brennon's the same way: an absolutely phenomenal drummer; his showmanship and the way he plays ... It's just awesome. He's always throwing sticks up in the air and standing up and just really fun to watch.

That being said, we do play modern music. So that's what we try to do. We want a kid to be listening in his room and

want to pick up a guitar. I've heard River say he wants to be somebody's inspiration for wanting to learn how to play guitar. We want to make it cool again, because, you know, it almost hasn't been cool in a while to play rock and roll or be in a band. So that's what we want to do. We want to be rock stars and we want to make it cool again.

JM: Is that why you went with big, fancy videos up front? Were videos just the way to make that happen?

ZL: Well, no. We just knew we needed an avenue to grab people's attention immediately. What's the best way you can come out of the blue and make somebody stop and say, "Where did these guys come from?" To us, the only way to do that was to be visually and sonically stimulating [by making] something really cool. So we felt that was the best avenue to take for that.

Alex Breaux, the guy that's done all of our videos so far, he's so incredibly hardworking. He puts in a lot of time with us and he's always so prepared. I can't recommend him enough.

As we talked, questions kept popping up about the music itself. And those answers were better found elsewhere.

A Breaux Bridge native, River Gibson found an unexpected love for music at the age of 11, when he first saw Green Day's "Boulevard of Broken Dreams" video while at a friend's house. He was instantly hooked. The interest soon turned into guitar lessons, and by the time he was in high school, he'd formed his first band. By 2012, he'd formed Tandem, the band that would eventually lead to his meeting Lyons and giving him his first taste of road life. They toured steadily for two years and played stages such as those of Festival International and The House of Blues. But it would soon come to an end as members went to school and the world moved on.

At this point, Gibson decided he was going to try something different. He was going to try out for American Idol. He

eventually found himself L.A.-bound to see if Idol stardom was awaiting him ...

River Gibson: The best thing about it for me was being able to meet so many people trying to do the same thing, you know? Everybody that makes it to Hollywood ... They're all great, you know what I mean? They all are good at what they're doing. And they know what they're doing. But as for the show, the judges were Harry Connick, Jr., Keith Urban and J-Lo, and, you know, it was cool to meet them. Harry Connick was definitely the most down to earth. He was definitely the one who was more interested in the artists on the show.

Everything was cool, but I think I was a little taken aback at how scripted it is. It is a TV show. People often forget that. It's not about who's best or anything like that. It's kind of about whatever they're looking for at the time; whatever they feel is right. They liked the people who they can kind of take and pull their arm in the direction they want them to go. So, I didn't really like that part too much. But to sum it up, it was a nice experience, but [I] would never do it again.



Photo by Edward A. McGrath

JM: No?

RG: Nope, nope. Not my style. I like being able to decide what I want to do and I how I want to do it.

JM: So, you come back home and what happened with you artistically between that time and the creation of Lvvr5?

RG: I tried doing different normal jobs for a little while. I was kind of down. I was just so invested in the music, and then when it all came to a halt, it was just kind of disorienting.

So I went to school and did that for a little while. And I tried, you know, working full time. But I knew I would always come back to music, and so I never really let it go.

I think it was maybe in early 2017 or late 2016 that I started putting my ideas together for what I wanted to do. I like pop music. That's what I like to make, and a lot of musicians don't really vibe with that. Zach did. So, I always kind of

had in the back of my head that that guy can help me do something great. So one night I [thought], "I'm just going to ask him." I sent him some tracks, you know, little things; voice memos and simple things. I had [completed], at that point, [something] like 300 songs. I was ready to get started, you know? I had about 20 that I knew were good songs, so I was ready. And sure enough, he fell in love with everything and we took off.

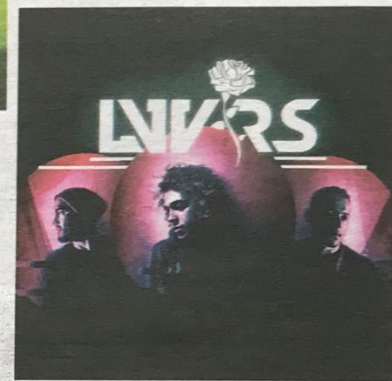
JM: By that point, you already were working with Brennan. Tell us about him and your musical background together

RG: Well, at the end of last year, I didn't really know if I wanted to go balls deep into an original band or what

I wanted to do. I was kind of thinking about doing a cover kind of thing and make some money. I could still be having fun. It's not really what I wanted to do, but it would kind of get me back into practice. And Brennan was my go-to. He's been my buddy for years.

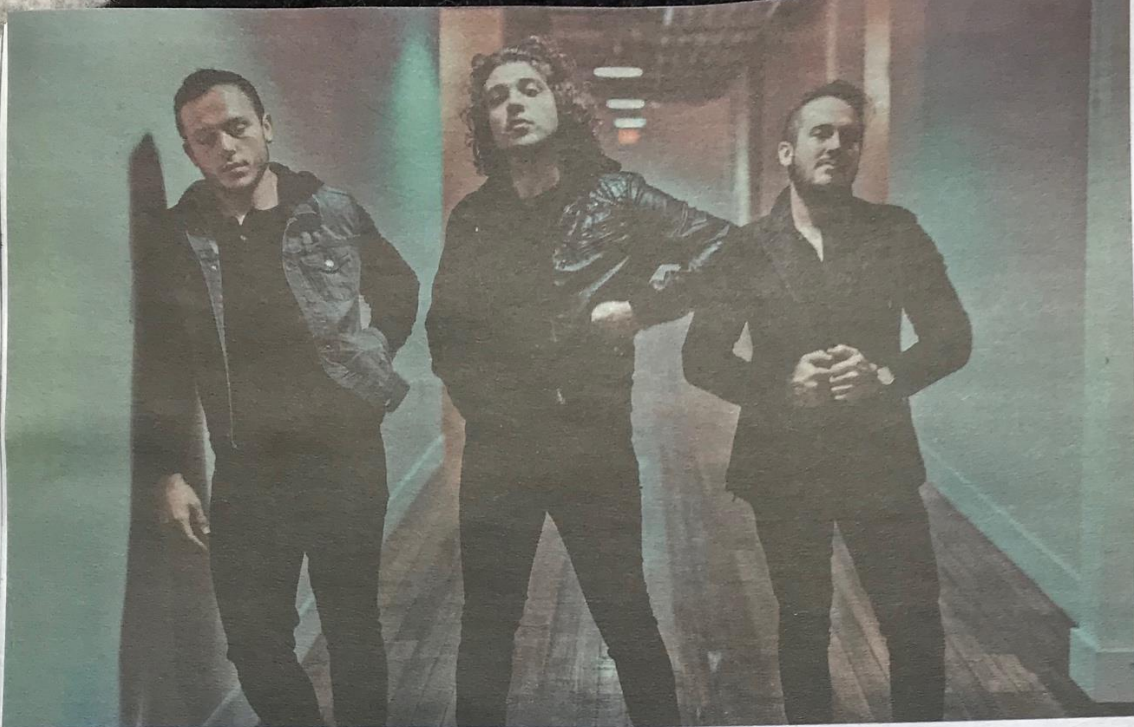
I played a little bit after Tandem as a solo act, and he played drums with me for that. So, we've been playing together since about 2015, I guess. He's the best drummer I know and probably the best guy I know, and I knew that he was the one. He's the kind of person you can trust with anything, and to me that was more important than anything — especially playing this style of music. This world that we're trying to get into ... having people around you you can count on means everything.

JM: So, at this point, we've got the three of you together, and you started off with a song called "Wild Heart." Zac said that was one you had written quite some time ago.



continued

Love Shack
LLC



RG: That's actually one of the first ones that I had sent [Lyons]. Yeah, it's an older song; probably the oldest of the bunch. I tried to record it a couple times, and it never really came out to my liking. So I was like, if I'm going to launch this band, I'm going to have that song because it's a good song, and I thought it really fit the vibe of Lvvr's. I wanted to lead off with that one ... And I still like that song a lot. We actually have a remix of it being done right now. That's what the song is honestly designed for, because it's got that dance hall vibe. I was always hoping somebody [would] try to remix it. So that's exciting. But we'll see how it goes.

Six weeks later saw their second release: a cover of Fleetwood Mac's "Dreams," which brought the band to most fans' attention. The video is currently sitting at more than 45,000 views. After its initial success, the band took off to Florida to shoot the video for the band's original song "Over You," which hit in August. Their latest track is a cover of Bazzi's "Mine."

RG: Well, "Dreams" did so well ... I didn't honestly know how people would perceive that going into it. But it was obvious that people really latched onto it. So, I kind of tossed up the idea of whether to take another old song and redo it like "Dreams." But I just wanted to experiment a little bit and maybe try a song that's hot right now.

I really like that song "Mine" by Bazzi. So I wanted to cut that and kind of try it in my head. I didn't really want to go out and drastically change it or anything like that. But I wanted to see how people would react to it.

As far as the video goes, what we're trying to do is for our original videos, we're trying to go all out [as we did for] "Over You." The cover videos, to me, are a chance to relate to the band. They're kind of a way to see what we're about and [what we're] like playing live. But they're just simple videos. We did "Dreams," and that was basically just us playing in the practice space. Simple, but you really got to see the band and how we are creating the music and playing the music.

Fortunately, seeing the band is becoming easier than it once was. The band has only recently started playing live shows. Performances in Austin and Pensacola recently went in the books, and one is scheduled at New Orleans' famed Howlin' Wolf in November.

As far as holding back on gigs in the earliest days of the band, Gibson says that, though unusual, the idea worked just fine for what these guys were trying to accomplish.

RG: We were never in a rush to play anywhere, because nobody was in a rush to see us, so why hurry? For most bands, if you're not playing all the time, they don't take you seriously. I guess we got a lot of flak because we were putting out videos and we'd never played a show. But that created demand. I'm not interested in playing to an empty bar. That's not what I'm about. I feel like that might have created some tension in the musician community or whatever. But again, that's not really what we're worried about. We're not really making music for musicians. We're making music that people can enjoy. We're doing exactly what we want to be doing. So that means everything to me.

As far as mass appeal goes, they certainly seem on track for that. Gibson says that even beyond social media reach, the band is getting its time on the airwaves, playing on nearly a dozen radio stations between Lake Charles and New Orleans and even reaching out west to Nevada ...

RG: Yeah, Facebook's been incredible. It's really where we've been getting a lot of the shares and all that kind of stuff. So that's kind of been our go-to. But we're everywhere you can find music. I try to send people to our Spotify. We've been doing great on iTunes and everything else. But we don't have anything physical yet. We're still in the digital vein, but we've been really blessed. Several radio stations in Lake Charles and especially here in Lafayette — I think we're at like six here in Lafayette — spin us. Rock 101 over there has "Dreams" on rotation. Mikee over there has been a huge support.

the day, an act like this is looking for a record deal. Young as they are as an act, those gears already seem to be in motion.

ZL: I don't know what I can say. We've met with three labels: two major labels and one smaller label. The two majors would be an absolute dream come true. Just the fact that that was even being discussed — I was just like "wow." Those things take a lot of time to negotiate, especially when you're a band like us that kind of came out of nowhere and haven't really proven yourselves yet. Other than that, we know what we're doing, and we have a good goal and a good vision. We just want to make sure that everything is right for us before we commit to anything.

So, we're kind of taking a step back and just making sure everything is cohesive and absolutely the right decision before we move forward.

Gibson had some final thoughts on the matter ...

RG: To tell you the truth, I originally thought we'd probably have an EP out by now. That's kind of the usual trajectory. But the way things are working out, each release gets better and better and people get more excited about it. It's fun to do those videos one at a time, and it's fun to not have to worry about putting a body of work out and hoping people listen to it and it doesn't just bounce back. To be honest, I'm not in a hurry to make any kind of mistakes like that.

So I'm enjoying the ride. We get more fans every day, and I think they're all enjoying the ride, too. That's not to say that I don't have the confidence. I have, like I told you earlier ... 350 songs? I'm not sure. I have a lot. (Laughs.) I have way too many. It's really bad. (Laughs.) But we have a lot done. We have about 10 or so [done]. Every single song is kind of a totally different vibe, you know. It's definitely Lvvr's; you can tell it's Lvvr's; but you know, we have some Green Day kind of punk rock anthem type things and we have this funk-like song. It's got cow bells and just weird dance — Marvin Gaye kind of stuff. It's awesome. But I'm so ready to do this other stuff that we've

for anybody yet.

But I will tell you, we do have this one particular song that, you know, I've always felt really strongly about and that's what I hint at at the end of the "Over You" video. There's a little teaser thing that we put there. But I'm just sitting around kind of waiting; hoping we have a little bit of help to release it, because it's a really good radio song. In fact, it's on radio; it's playing across the country in Nevada. A couple of radio stations over there [have it] in heavy rotation and it's not even out yet. I had meant to send them "Over You" and I ended up accidentally sending this other song, and they're like ... We're going to play this one. (Laughs.) But we're kind of figuring out how to shop. What to do with it is kind of the game we're playing right now. We do have plenty of other songs. You'll have to wait and see what we do with them.

Such is the case with any good mystery, I suppose. Even using your best detective skills will sometimes leave you just waiting for some resolution or great revelation that will come only in its time.

Such is the case, I should say, for Lvvr's as well. Both the critics and the fans can only wait and see what the future holds for these starry-eyed rockers. I do think they represent a changing tide of what modern bands are and how they get noticed and make their mark in the social media/digital age. These musicians recognize that it is that world where their target audience is, and it will take an unconventional approach — something none of them have been afraid of.

In return, they have traction, demand and even the ear and attention of some of the biggest labels in the industry.

For those who think that they are merely a cover band, I can dispel that bit of mystery here and now. With a bevy of original material at the ready, I believe they will prove in time to be the unique, original and in-demand touring act.

Anyone curious to see for themselves what the Lvvr's live show is all about will have a chance or two to do so in the days to come. On Saturday, Nov. 3, River Gibson will share the bill with Billy Raffoul at the 106.3 Sessions Series at Jefferson Street Pub in Lafayette from noon to 3 pm with no cover. Donations will be accepted for Red Cross Hurricane relief efforts on the East Coast.

For the full-on Lvvr's experience, it's a trip to the legendary Howlin' Wolf in New Orleans on Saturday, Nov. 10, starting at 8 pm. Lvvr's will be headlining #pureCHAOS, hosted by Alt 92.3's Chris Chaos. They will be joined on the bill by Typical Stereo, Hollow City, The Colour You, Cerebral Drama and The Fixers. Tickets are \$10 and are available at ticketweb.com.

So, whether you've "felt the Lvv" as of yet, I recommend you go see what these guys are about, both online and live, if you have the chance. It would be a shame to share a hometown with these guys and have your friends nationwide find out about them before you do — because at this rate, they very well might.

Best of luck to you Lvvr's and to you all ... I'll see you at the show!

I'll tell you something true about myself, I like a bit of mystery ...

— "Wild Heart" by Lvvr's