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## Straight ahead rockers: Meet The Thieves

Interview by Sean Deter

"For those of you who rock!" Those words led off a press release that found its way to my desk last week. And, being someone who has a proclivity to rock, I took note.

I'm glad I did. The band is The Thieves, three good-looking lads — Sam Stokes (bass, vocals), his older brother Hal (lead vocals/guitar) and Jamie "Dirty Daws" Dawson (drums) — who relocated to Los Angeles a few years back after developing a rabid local following in Oxford, England.

Their sound? I could hop on the press bandwagon and say something like this: The Thieves incorporate a sound that joins the current trend of glam-rock throwbacks (think T. Rex and Ziggy-era Bowie) and toss in some big, beefy rock flourishes that recall AC/DC in their prime.

But I won't. The Thieves sound like, well, The Thieves. It's music that you don't have to analyze to appreciate. It's music that just plain rocks.

And after listening to the band's "White Line EP," you'll wish you had a louder stereo.

Gigging to promote "White Line," an earlier full-length, "One-Eyed Poker," and their upcoming record, "Tales from the White Line," the boys launched a 19-city tour of the U.S. and Canada this week. The Thieves' third stop is Boise, where they play tonight at the Neurolux, 111 N. 11th downtown.

I caught up with Hal Stokes in L.A. last week as the band prepared to hit the road.

**SD: Oxford, England, to Los Angeles. A little bit of a move. Why did you guys decide to hop to the other side of the pond?**

**HS:** We did it about, must have been three years now we made the jump. When we were in England, locally in Oxford, we were selling out every night we played. We were really big locally — but whenever we went out of Oxford there was no rock movement, so (Oxford) was the only place around we could really make a dent. We had some contacts in America — people in America got a hold of us and invited us to play some shows here... That went well. All of the things that were happening in America, none were happening in England. So we just made the jump — sold everything we had and just moved everything out here.

**SD: So, you took a huge risk.**

**HS:** Yeah, but the bad thing is as



soon as we did that, there was a band called The Darkness that made it big. Suddenly, rock was cool again. (To paraphrase Hal, the band was quite disappointed at their unlucky timing). But since we've been here, it's gone well. It's been a bit of a road at times, but...

**SD: Is it true that you guys formed while at a gig performing Spinal Tap covers?**

**HS:** (Laughs) We were called "Vade Mecum" and we were probably... the biggest local band in Oxford (Hal was quick to point out that he and the band had not yet quite reached the level of a few other local acts, including Radiohead). They used to have this thing called "Your Song," which the local promoter would have all local bands play cover songs but tell them to play them in their own style. It could be anything from Blur songs to Rolling Stones songs, but the idea is to normally do things quite silly and have a laugh... We basically got this plan together that we'd do Spinal Tap. It was the last night at this venue — it was going to close down... We were the very last band on the very last night...

**SD: Much of the publicity that The Thieves have received paints the band as a throwback to glam-rock icons T. Rex and Ziggy-era Bowie — with AC/DC throw in for good measure. Does it worry you that potential fans may be tempted to write you off as just another retro outfit?**

**HS:** It doesn't really. I mean, I love all of those bands. If people do so, I see that as more of a compliment, really. I tell you, if we do sound like that then we're doing better than I thought we were.

But I don't think we actually do sound like any of those bands. I don't really know what we sound like. I mean, a lot of people say there's a bit of U2 in it, which I can kind of see. I can see the AC/DC in terms of straight-ahead rock. But I think we're the first to admit that we're not claiming to be the most original new band to come out since Radiohead. We do what we do, and that's it really. So I don't really get offended if people start taking an opinion, and if those bands really are the ones we're compared to, then good.

**SD: About the lyrics on the "The White Line EP" — there seems to be a common theme in which the writer is vowing to rise up after being struck down or oppressed. You wrote the lyrics. Am I missing the mark?**

**HS:** No, you hit the nail right on the head. And those feelings, I think are what everyone has. Anyone who's got a heartbeat heads down and then comes up again, and by definition that's just life. There are specifics about what some of those songs are about — which I won't tell you — but it's just a way of getting those feelings out and also to communicate with other people. I think everyone who has those feelings will relate to the songs. I think music's more than just the sounds of the notes and all the bits and pieces. Rock and roll is more of a lifestyle than just a sound; so I think that when people listen to it, they're asking what that says to them.

**SD: Even with the move, and all the work, there's still a chance The Thieves could fade into obscurity like thousands of other bands. But**

After making the move from Oxford, England, to Los Angeles, The Thieves (l-r: Hal Stokes, Sam Stokes and Jamie Dawson) are hoping America will catch on to the band's straight-forward approach to rock and roll. Hal Stokes and Co. will shake things up a bit in Boise tonight at the Neurolux.

**The Thieves at Neurolux**

**When:** The Screws open at 8 p.m. tonight, with The Thieves hitting the stage at around 8:30.

**Where:** 111 N. 11th, downtown

**Cost:** \$3

**Who can go:** Ages 21 and older

**it, too.**

**HS:** Absolutely. I won't deny that we're very ambitious and we push things all the time. But it wouldn't stop us if we don't get the huge, million-dollar deal from Sony. We would still do what we do anyway. So, it's a mixture of both: Yeah, we're very ambitious and pushing it forward and we do have an impenetrable faith in what we do...

**SD: So, I've heard you have a reputation as showmen. What can people expect in Boise on Friday?**

**HS:** You know, I've been doing this since I was 14. My dad used to drive me to the shows and he basically made me play gigs. He said, "The only way you're going to get good is by playing live. So me and my older brother were out playing from 14 onwards and the one thing we learned fairly quickly was it really is "the show" when you go to see a live show. If you want just the music, you put on the CD — and it's probably going to sound better. So, we really try and entertain people. Not in a cheesy way. It's not like we put on theater. It's not some formulated show — we just get up and rock... It's a very explosive, live exciting show.

**SD: And you'll be happy doing**