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Oxford, Toronto, Los Angeles, Boise

The Thieves hit the City of Trees for a kick-ass show and some studio time

BY [AMY ATKINS](#)

After finding the Thieves' *Tales From the White Line* among the piles of press kits on my desk, I was pleased to discover I love their music. And as disappointed as I was to learn that I'd missed them when they'd been through town before, I wasn't about to miss their March 3 show at the Bouquet. Their live performance was amazing (sound issues and all), and if that weren't enough, they agreed not only to an interview, but to let me sit in on their Sunday afternoon recording session at Tonic Room Studios.

When I arrived at the studio, recording was in full swing. I crept into the engineering booth to watch and listen. Terms I'd never heard before--but which everyone else was clearly familiar with--were bandied about as both engineers and the musicians tried for sound perfection. The tediousness that is good recording became clear. In the hours that I sat listening and watching, the band worked on only one song and then only bits of that. When asked if there would be time to work on any other new songs, Chris Parks, one of the studio's owner/engineers, said something fairly obvious but that many musicians may not take to heart: "Better to get one song perfect, than get four songs half right."

During a break, I chatted up the Thieves: brothers Hal and Sam Stokes (29 and 25 years old respectively) and 30-year-old Jamie Dawson. They're soft-spoken, friendly Brits who I enjoyed getting to know. They told me they've been listening to Fleetwood Mac (the Peter Green years) and Supergrass while driving around the country, and that Boise's Bombay Grill has the best Indian food they've eaten in the United States outside of Lawrence, Kansas. Politically, socially and musically knowledgeable fellows, I could have talked with them for hours, but with recording foremost in their minds, they needed to get back on task and we agreed to pick up again the next day.

On the following rainy Monday afternoon (that reminded all three men of home), I sat down in a diner with the tired and hungry band. After ordering omelets and apple juice, the three blokes told me a bit of the band's history.

All three men were raised in Oxford, England, and it was there that these rockers first learned to rock. The brothers Stokes were encouraged by their musical family to play in bands and even Dawson found some early family support (technically, he "convinced" his older brother to give up his paper route money so that Dawson could buy his first drum kit). Hal Stokes knew Dawson from a young age and they all grew up together in the Oxford music scene. (Note: For the first gig the three played together, they were dressed in mullet wigs and spandex at a Spinal Tap tribute show.) In 2001, Hal and Sam traveled to Los Angeles for a whirlwind mini-tour which included seven shows in 30 days. While gigging around the City of Angels, they caught the eye of Steven Smith (one-time Lenny Kravitz manager). Smith encouraged the Stokes brothers to make L.A. their home. While in L.A., they kept in touch with Dawson, and after seven drummers (yes, we made *Spinal Tap* jokes about spontaneous combustion), the Stokes brothers asked Dawson to come out and jam with them. The chemistry among the three men clearly worked and Dawson made L.A. his new home, too.

The Thieves talked about the difficulty of living and working in Los Angeles. With the "pay-to-play" attitude in most L.A. clubs, they said, the music scene isn't very cohesive. If a band can get enough people to a show, they (the band) don't have to pay to perform. But, at \$12 a ticket, it can be hard to get people in. Hal said the Thieves know enough club owners and have garnered enough followers that they don't have to pay to do a show. But, he said, it's really tough for young bands trying to make their mark. Which is, in part, why they moved to Shadow Hills, outside of the city. They are still close enough to L.A. to check out all the up-and-coming bands that come through there but far enough away that they don't feel affected by everyone hustling to make a deal. It is in their Shadow Hills studio that they can live and breathe their music.

In 2002, the Thieves released their first album, *One Eyed Poker*, with producer Chris Brown. According to the band, it was more alternative/melodic rock than what they're currently doing, which is still melodic but is more in-your-face rock and roll. After the 2005 release of their second album, *Tales From the White Line*, the Thieves hit the road again and they're still going strong. With enough material already written, they could put another album out right away, but instead of recording and *then* touring, they're going to preview all the new stuff while they're on the road and then take a few months off to get it tracked out.

With the drive to their Salt Lake City show looming ahead, Hal, Sam and Jamie finished off the last of their home fries and toast. They told me they love Boise and can't wait to come back. With a fabulous Thieves T-shirt and Hal, Sam and Jamie's e-mail addresses in hand, I left them to their work and went back to mine, happily knowing that the Thieves will return.

