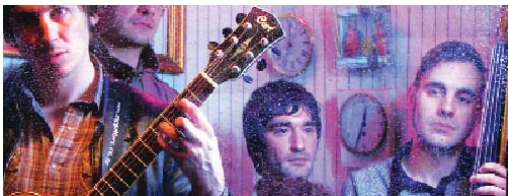


Glossary

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| humdrum | rutina aburrida |
| songwriting | composición |
| plying his trade | practicar un oficio |
| backyard | casa adoptada |
| critical acclaim | gran suceso |
| label (music) | sello |
| boasts | dispone |
| roster | lista |
| straight off | inmediatamente |
| saved up | ahorrar |
| nearest and dearest | tus queridos |
| steeped | prendido en sus dedos |
| rockabilly | mezcla de rock negro y "country" |
| clocking up | acumular/lograr |
| go on the road | viajar |
| uphill task | una tarea muy difícil |
| dodgy | arriesgado |
| cool | guay |
| word of mouth | la boca a boca |
| soapbox | la tribuna improvisada |
| earned his crust | ganarse el lugar |
| leery | receloso |
| embark on | empezar |
| clue-y | intuitivo |
| a great deal of | mucho/cantidad grande |
| wear you down | agotar |
| in good stead | en buena lugar |
| in store | de camino |
| playing/performing | actua en directo |
| gruelling | muy muy duro |
| (24 nights) in a row | seguidas |
| make or break you | lograrlo o morir |
| knackered | echa polvo |
| nipped away to | fue rapido a |
| to top it all off | coronar/rematar |
| looking forward to | deseando |
| taken with | quedarse encantado con algo |
| hanging on (his every word) | prestando mucha atención a |
| our roaming ways | tendencia a viajar |
| often mean | suele significar |
| adamant | se insiste |
| anything juicy | algo muy interesante y divertido |
| euphemism | eufemismo |
| turns into | se convierte |
| juicy | jugoso |
| gems | joyas |
| likeability factor | la capacidad de asegurar que les cae bien a los demás |
| crafty fecker | tio taimado(argot) |
| goss (gossip) | cotilleo(argot) |
| makes your week | te alegra la semana |



Q

Try to answer these questions based on the story

- 1) Who was Aaron expecting to interview him?
- 2) Where did Aaron go on holiday after the Edinburgh Festival?
- 3) How many years in a row has Aaron performed at the Edinburgh Festival?
- 4) Why is Aaron excited about performing in Madrid?
- 5) What, according to Aaron, is so great about expats?
- 6) How has Aaron's style changed over the years?
- 7) List all the adjectives that have been used to describe Aaron.
- 8) What else has Aaron done other than perform live?
- 9) In Aaron's opinion, what type of person might have difficulty living in a foreign city?
- 10) What emotion are a lot of Aaron's songs about?
- 11) Why are "the skies blue" for Aaron?

LIVIN' THE DREAM

With a hit record and a flamenco dancing wife, Aaron Thomas has got it made. Russell Parton talks to the singer-songwriter about how it all started

Whether following a dream or escaping the humdrum, we all have a story as to why we're here in Madrid. So on meeting the latest *guiri* all-singing all-songwriting sensation, Aaron Thomas, I was ready to hear another. The Australian's been plying his trade in our adopted backyard for four years now, in which time he's not only recorded his debut album, *Follow the Elephant*, to critical acclaim, but he's also managed to get signed to Everlasting Records, a label that boasts on its roster Mercury Rev and Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds.

When we meet it's breakfast time, and I'm in need of some coffee. Straight off we start trading travel stories like a couple of Erasmus students. "My wife's a Flamenco dancer," he tells me. "She came here first, stayed for about year and eventually I saved up and joined her."

It seems nearly all his nearest and dearest are steeped in musical tradition. His father's a very accomplished guitarist, and his stepfather was a famous singer in the 50s and 60s in Australia, playing 50s rockabilly and rock and roll and clocking up eight number one hits there

"That's the music I grew up with," says Thomas. "When we were kids we used to go on the road all the time, me and my twin brother in the van, going to shows all around Australia.

Making a name for yourself in Madrid on Spanish terms as a non-native musician I'd imagine would be an uphill task, but for Aaron it was surprisingly simple.

"All I did was walk about with my *maqueta*, my demo, and just leave it in different bars and I got calls back," he says. "So I started playing gigs and from that I started forming little groups. I just left my email and phone number and this dodgy recording of something I did before I left Australia and it worked out."

Aaron's affection for the city and its uncomplicated attitude towards new artists is effecting, and for a moment I almost join him on his soapbox. "A lot of foreigners complain that it's behind in so many ways, but for me there's always been an almost naïve exuberance here," he says. "In my experience, people don't tend to hide or to say that something's not cool enough. There's no 'shall I clap or shall I not clap?' If someone really likes what you do they'll do everything they can to help you and they'll tell people.

"The word of mouth thing here in Madrid is awesome, and it really works."

Take note, budding musicians, that Aaron was once just like you, working the work, almost talking the talk. He's teaching an English class later, but assures me it's a one-off favour for a friend. The Irish pub circuit he knows well too, having earned his crust in both Moores and O'Neills. He describes how difficult it was, being a sensitive lad, having leery types click their fingers and hiss at him for attention, and assures me he's a lot happier now, despite the instability of life as a musician. "All I want from it is to get to play, to travel and to make a bit of money," he says. "Not a great deal. But just to go perform — it's a lot of fun."

Of course, practically every foreigner here is trying to reach beyond the narrow range of their experiences and to challenge themselves in new ways. Being the outsider looking in on another culture must have the effect of a lightning bolt on his creative faculties. "Absolutely," he agrees. "Fuck yeah.

"A lot of my songs are about that feeling of frustration," he continues. "It's great to be in a foreign city, but if you're a proud person it can sometimes wear you down because you're always feeling slightly retarded: you're not as articulate as you'd like to be, you're not as knowledgeable as you'd like to be, you're not as clue-y as you'd like to be, and that's the negative thing about being a foreigner, when you don't quite feel a part of it.

"But that's a great deal of material right there if you're a singer song-writer."

Now with a settled band of local musicians that favours acoustic double-bass over electric, Aaron is already busy planning his follow-up album. The simplicity of his arrangements has stood him in good stead, the catchy melodies reigning and his singing style, which he admits is, in part, Flamenco inspired, adding a gypsy flavour to proceedings. He's about to embark on a tour, playing in New York for the first time. The album's now been released in the US and the UK, so more dates are in store. He's also going to have to attend to the small matter of becoming a dad before the year's out. As we bid farewell on a cloudy day in late October, it's clear that in the world of Aaron Thomas at least, the skies are blue.

For comments, suggestions, or to report an error, please contact didactic@in-madrid.com