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Zeus

By [Evan Schlansky](#) April 2nd, 2012 at 7:00 am

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Here's a first for our ongoing Writer of the Week series — dual answers from dual songwriters. Toronto-based rock band Zeus have been racking up acclaim for their third album, *Busting Visions*. *Esquire* went as far as to say they're "as fun as 21st century classic rock gets." We asked Carlin Nicholson and Neil Quin about *Busting Visions*, their all-powerful band name, their approach to songwriting and more.

Carlin Nicholson:

What's the story behind the band name?

We had recorded many songs before we even really knew we were a band. A friend of ours – Peter Elkas – asked us if we'd like to play a show with him. We had no name. Mike stammered his way to Zeus and so it was. We would make reference to many silly things through word games in the studio as in: "Sounds like juice, sounds like Zeus' juices...sounds like ZEUS."

How does the songwriting process work in the band?

It's a bit different for every dude how the song actually comes in, what stage it's in at that time, etc. But the end result is always something that pleases us all and we all worked to make ours. Three songwriters makes for a lot to wrangle, but we love the challenge.

Who are some bands with multiple songwriters you admire, and why?

Kinks, Beach Boys, Sloan, Superfriends, Dr. Dog, Queen. I think the reason why we like bands – at least the ones that stay with us – almost always boils down to good songs and great albums.

What's a song of yours that's really touched people?

There always seems to be a song or two at every show that we upset someone by not playing. (Not that upset.) It is a great thing to move someone in a way that they feel so much for that they need to just come and talk to us about it. Off of our last album, “Kindergarten,” “Fever Of The Time,” and “River by the Garden” are all songs that have repeatedly come up in some way or another. Whether it be a cover, a request, or just a real strong feeling for, it's great.

When did you start writing songs? Were they good right away, or did that come later?

Umm, I started writing when I started playing an instrument that played notes (i.e. not drums). So I guess that was age 13 or 14. I'm sure there were a lot of misfires... haha. But like now — you pick through the material and sift through to find the ones you feel strongest about.

What's a song on your *Busted Visions* your particularly proud of?

I love the sound of “Love In A Game”. It was a new one when we started recording and kind of just rushed its way to the front of the pack of my songs we were most excited about. We planned a lot about the recording as well with our friend Robbie Lackritz – we had a very specific drum sound in mind referencing Little Richard and Queen, and Robbie wrangled it real nice-like. Very proud of all the elements of that song in performance, sound and arrangement.

What's a lyric on the album you're especially proud of?

“Half hearts don't produce in the start it's up to you to complete it with yours” – “Messengers Way”

I just like the idea that there is a half heart roaming around somewhere in the world – and that you hold the other half of it. Unless you make that bold move to follow your deepest instincts, you may never find it. Leaving two halves to forever pine.

Neil Quin:

Are there any words you love, or hate?

I think every word has it's place somewhere. I think maybe the name Skylar is a bit jarring (sorry to any Skylars reading this, I can't help the way I feel).

What's your typical approach to songwriting? Do you revise a lot, or do you like to write automatically?

Every song is different- but as long as the main idea of a piece is there, then the song has practically written itself. It's really just a matter of time spent and hopefully some lovely surprises along the way.

What sort of things inspire you to write?

Love in all of its forms. Family and friends are very important to Zeus, and I think a lot of our songs are a tribute to that notion

What's the last song you wrote or started? Tell us about it.

It's a song called "The Long Way" and I wrote it on an old parlor organ I have in my house. I love the sound of the bass foot pedals on it and I was playing around. All of a sudden I had a new song.

Who are your songwriting heroes?

Stevie Wonder, Freddie Mercury, Paul, John, George, Robert Smith, Prince, Ann and Nancy Wilson, Michael Jackson and so, so many more. Too many good ones.

Who's an underrated songwriter in your opinion?

David Gahan from Depeche Mode. They have some really wonderful songs.

What do you consider to be the perfect song?

"Signed, Sealed, Delivered." Perfect for weddings, car rides, nice nights at home, bbqs, you name it. You would have to be in an exceptionally bad mood to not light up when that song comes on.


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Luke Bowden · Toronto, Ontario

Great insights into a dense creative partnership.


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Mackenzie J. Jordan · Waterloo - Oxford District Secondary School

You guys are the tits.

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Lincoln Barr · Singer-songwriter at Red Jacket Mine

I agree completely about "Signed, Sealed, Delivered." And placing Ann & Nancy along with the greats, too...I heard "Even It Up" yesterday and it killed me.

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