

Tonstartssbandht on learning to do things yourself



April 25, 2017 - Tonstartssbandht are the Orlando, Florida-based psychedelic rock duo of brothers Edwin and Andy White. They've made a name for themselves with their energetic live show and seemingly nonstop touring schedule. Their new record, Sorcerer, came out in April of 2017 on Mexican Summer.

As told to Gary Canino, 1754 words.

Tags: Music, Process, Inspiration, Adversity.

Your catalog seems to be evenly split between live records and studio albums. How did you get started recording and releasing live records?

Andy: I'd been pretty into archiving and documenting our stuff, but never really with enough focus or effort when it came down to the live show to actually capture it well enough to want to release it. Then, there was a particular European tour where we were going to hit places we had never played before. We were talking with our friend Britton Powell about going to play Belarus for the first time. He was like, "Wow, you're going to play in Minsk? You should bring a four track on that tour and make a live album. I want to hear Tonstartssbandht *Live in Minsk*."

I was inspired by the idea of bringing some multi-track stuff, specifically on that tour. We recorded the whole tour on a digital interface. That ended up becoming a record that Britton subsequently released as [2016's] Overseas. Once I got into the rhythm and the habit of recording live shows thoroughly, it wasn't too hard to start recording most of our tours. It just made sense to release a bunch of live albums when we didn't have any new material to release and were digging all the shows we were recording.

Do you ever work with outside producers or engineers?

Andy: We've tried on a couple occasions to work with individuals to record in an assortment of places. It's never been something that we've jumped into eagerly. Not to say that we didn't try with an open mind. It's just never really been our cup of tea. Part of the creative process for me is actually putting a mic on an amp or figuring out how the room is going to sound, being very aware of my own presence as a body and the space that I'm recording.

Edwin: I feel more comfortable on a stage performing for a bunch of strangers than I do recording something in a studio with one person. The vibe is never really natural. It's always slightly uncanny or something.

Andy: It feels like you get close, but end up doing an impression of what you meant to do in the first place.

Edwin: The thing is, even at The Wallet [a Bushwick recording space and loft], the living room is the jam room, if you want to call it that. People were always walking in during rehearsals, even during recordings, and making macaroni and cheese and stuff.

Andy: People would make things like fish head stew. On the record you can hear my roommate, whose bedroom was literally built into the living room. He would just listen to us jam all day long. He facetiously goes, "Boo!" at the beginning of Sorcerer.

Those kind of things can give strange life to a recording. You can hear the water heater on the recording as well.

Andy: I always forget that you can hear the train and the water heater, because I'm so ingrained with living there for four years. I still forget that that's what that [sounds like]. I block it out. I'm not really concerned with having total silence and control over the sound anyway. I don't know if I'll live [at the Wallet] again. It's just a documentation of our time there and the creative projects that we put our hearts toward.

On a basic level, Sorcerer could resemble Overseas because you're playing live, but then it's also not a live show.

Andy: Yeah, except for the roommate who's taking a shower, washing dishes, or making eggs in the background of the recording.

Do you find that being in a certain city, whether it's Orlando or Brooklyn, impacts your head space and the recording as well?

Edwin: I think I can find a head space wherever I need to be. It may not come as quickly, but it's not city-specific.

Andy: When it comes down to straight-up recording, it's more contingent on the immediate space I'm in, the room, and maybe my emotional head space. I'd say where you are geographically or where you've living for a while has a greater tendency to generally influence how you're feeling, the way you're playing, and what you're playing.

When I'm recording Tonstartssbandht, I like to get a room sound. I close mic some stuff, but I find that, although I'm not very well trained at it, the sound I'm best at producing is further away with room mics and stuff. Having all the space at The Wallet and the freedom to do that was helpful for getting a bit of a momentum and self motivation to go back each day and keep recording. I would listen to the demos and be like, "These sound cool. We should keep trying."

Are you into having several different versions of the same song released? Are you into the idea of a song out there that can change depending on where and when it's played?

Andy: I don't think it's something we necessarily strive for or aim to do, because we try not to put too many limits on ourselves. We're happy to release something more than once, and we certainly have.

I remember hearing that you toured the country of Georgia with no equipment. Was that intentional or out of necessity?

Edwin: That was because of the lack of finances to provide our own gear: it's expensive to rent gear overseas. You certainly can't bring anything beyond guitars, some pedals, maybe cymbals and snare if you really want to waste the precious cargo space on your overseas flight. We'd rather bring merch because you need to sell it to have a little extra cash in your pocket. The tour we're on right now is our first tour in Europe where we're using rented gear in a van. It's costing us more, but it's the more standard way to tour around there. Previously we'd always just take trains and buses and borrow gear at every show because it was the only way to keep it affordable enough to even happen.

On that tour, was there ever a panic moment where you got to a venue and the gear wasn't usable?

Andy: I remember once we set up to what ended up being a really nice and wonderful gig at a café in Warsaw, where they didn't have drums or something. Eddie ended up playing some boxes or something. He had just a snare with him. It was cool.

Edwin: I'd stomp my right foot onto the floor and it would shake the whole café.

Andy: I just played my guitar very quietly.

Edwin: I think there's a song or two from that Warsaw show that's on Overseas. I just played a lot on the edge of the snare, or stomped my foot. I did a lot more singing... it was a weird set.

Andy: We did a show once at a school a friend of ours was teaching at in the Republic of Georgia. We went to visit him after a tour of Russia and Ukraine. He said, "Don't worry. They're going to have [equipment] for you to play there. We'll get it all setup for you." We said, "That's cool. Excited to just hang out with these kids and perform for them." When we got there, it was an acoustic guitar that was quite literally broken at the neck. It looked like a prop guitar that had been smashed over a cowboy's head. And a piano that was completely out of tune. That was an interesting performance.

Edwin: First the kids performed for us, and did 20 or 30 minutes of insanely beautiful national songs and a national dance, with so much enthusiasm and pride and love. Then it was like, "Now it's your turn." We were in this one room schoolhouse in a really small village with kids from the ages of five all the way to 18. We were just like, "We don't know what the fuck to do. None of these instruments work." There was a language barrier. "Sorry, is there anything else we can play?" We ended up doing, I think, two songs. It was mostly just singing a capella and holding the C chord on the piano because as long as you didn't move up and down the keys it sounded okay.

It was a beautiful moment, but it was probably the most embarrassed I've ever been performing because I felt like I was blushing. I was just like, "This is ridiculous." I just felt out of my comfort zone, but it was totally fine. Even the kids, you can tell, were like, "What the fuck is going on?" What are these goons doing? After we did all that really sick dancing?" We were just like, "Hey, we're the reason everyone's here. We're going to sing a capella and it's going to suck."

On the other hand, it could be a developed skill if you're able to roll with the punches and do more with less.

Andy: Yeah, it was a learning experience.

If a small thing goes wrong at a show now, are you more prepared to be like, "Oh, this is nothing—I played drums on a cardboard box once"?

Andy: Yes, but maybe just more as a reflection of the fact that we're getting a little older and wiser and more satisfied, so we're generally unfazed by little hiccups in most aspects of our life. Right now, what we're doing is a two piece guitar-and-drums-singing-boogie rock band. If something goes wrong, it's not the end of the world.

Edwin: Last night, we played this old monastery in Dijon, France, that had vaulted stone ceilings from the 1300s. During one of the heavier songs, it was so loud that plaster started falling onto my snare drum. It was fine, but a bunch of little rocks and plaster just fell all over my kit, hair, and snare drum. I was just like, "Is a block about to fall on me and kill me?"

Andy: It seemed reasonable that the chapel was beginning to crumble above us. That would've been more than a hiccup, though. That probably would've been a game changer. We just don't want the buildings we play in to structurally collapse while we're inside.

Tonstartssbandht recommends:

ANIMALS OF ALLOVER
HUMANS OF WHENEVER
PLANTS OF HISSING
MINERALS OF OUT
LANGUAGE OF ITS OWN

Name

Tonstartssbandht

Vocation

Musicians, Songwriters

Fact

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