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FRIDAY, JULY 30, 2010

## 'Nasty, poppy, '60s, weird': In the studio with Chicago's King Sparrow

Posted by [Frank](#)



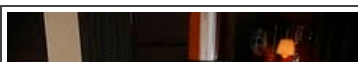
King Sparrow at Gallery of Carpet studio

If you've visited this site with any regularity over the past couple years, you've probably seen the name "King Sparrow" more than once. When I dig something - when I really, truly believe something is special - I can't shut up about it. And that is most certainly the case with [King Sparrow](#), a Chicago indie three-piece who are hands down one of the most genuinely talented, sincere bands I've had the pleasure of hearing and getting to know since I began Windy City Rock.

The guys - vocalist/guitarist Eric Georgevich, bassist Sean Price and drummer John McGeown - are set to release their debut full-length this Fall with a record release show set for **Friday, October 15 at Schubas**, and recently invited me to spend some time with them in the studio as they worked through the mixing phase. They recorded the album this Spring with Brian Zieske at [Gallery of Carpet studio](#), which we highlighted a while back in our article on some of the [greatest recording studios in the Chicago area](#). Brian, Eric, Sean and John were all incredibly cool in letting me hang out and giving me a look into the process as they prepared their art to be unleashed unto the world.

It was a wonderful thing to experience. All four of these guys are so incredibly dedicated to this record (which, for my money, is shaping up to be nothing short of phenomenal), that no nuance of each and every song has gone overlooked. King Sparrow have a steel-solid vision, and they've been sacrificing sleep and sanity to make sure it's born properly. Brian has been right there with them, working behind the controls like a man possessed. This is the kind of collective energy that spawns the world's most inspired records.

While I was at the studio, Brian and the band worked on two of the album's tracks, "Moonshine" and "End Goal."



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The two are among the tracks the band refer to as “nasty,” meaning they are the grittiest ones, the ones most likely to make you stop whatever you’re doing and rock out on the spot. “Moonshine” is a relentless number that manages to do a hell of a lot of rocking in under two minutes. It’s one of the first songs the band started playing together and a staple of their live shows, so it’s excellent to see it finally getting a proper recorded debut. “End Goal” rocks just as hard, plowing through from its first second with a gnarly surf guitar riff and some wonderfully gristly vocals from Eric. These two tracks are perfect examples of what makes King Sparrow so special. Their material is surprisingly accessible, pulling you in immediately while never sacrificing its glorious punky edge, rawness and swagger. It’s a combination of grit and magnetism I’ve seldom heard executed so well.



Brian Zieske of Gallery of Carpet studio

In addition to the down-and-dirty rockers, the LP will feature songs with a poppier - but equally driving - approach such as the soaring, optimistic “The River” and “Resonator,” which boasts killer hooks and a sweet vocal harmony. Other songs the band have been working on will round out the album with what they refer to as a “weird/'60s” sound, such as the cryptic, chugging “Derailer” (which originally appeared in an earlier version on the band’s 2009 debut EP) and the eerie “Lie.” All of these sounds come together to define King Sparrow’s style, and to serve as a reminder of what makes rock and roll so damn exciting in the first place.

This is going to be one hell of a record. A record that people must hear.

While at Gallery of Carpet, Brian and the band took some time out from the mixing madness to sit down with me for an interview. We talked about the recording process and how everyone’s been working together, as well as both the band’s and producer’s background and unique vision. Here’s what they had to say:

**WCR: How's the experience of making this record been going?**

**Brian:** The motto's been “nothing good is easy.” We figure if we work harder it'll be that much

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better.

**Eric:** We've been flying by the seat of our pants the whole way through.

**Sean:** It's very focused, though. The whole thing has been very focused on getting a good sound. It's fly by the seat of your pants, but there's definitely been a plan to it. It's been efficient, but it has been intense.

**Eric:** The sense of urgency is causing us to go with our gut instinct.

**Brian:** When we knew it was good, we moved on. We did a couple extra takes of the vocals so we could have options, but when it came to the tracking, we'd set up, get a tone, make sure the instruments were in tune, get the levels right, and play it like it was the first song of a show. And then boom, we'd capture it. The energy was in it. We'd capture things in one take. If somebody messed up, we'd have to do the whole take again, which meant everybody re-cut their parts.

**Eric:** Yeah, the energy is there. One day we were trying to get tone for the song "Constellations" and it went on all day long. We couldn't capture it. It went on 'til like 12 o'clock at night and we couldn't do it so we figured we needed to stop. We shut everything down, feeling pretty defeated. Then all of a sudden Brian's eyes got this weird little twinkle and was like "how would you guys feel if we tried it one more time?" We all shot up...

**Brian:** I had an idea, it clicked. Something we had to do with the guitar to get it right.

**Eric:** You got the tone, we were ready to go, then all of a sudden we hear "oh shit," and then we look at each other thinking like, the console fried, or something blew up.

**John:** Brian looks at me dead in the eyes and goes, "we're shutting down all the power to the studio right now. My circuit board was popping." Then when he turned it back on, we got right down to it and we nailed it in one take. The day ended victorious. By three in the morning we were good.



Photo by Catticut Palich

**Brian, what's it been like working with these guys as opposed to other bands you've worked with?**

**Brian:** The amount of preparation they came in with. Super professional. Before we started, they wanted to meet me, see the studio, talk face to face. I met with them over a year ago, so I knew them and had been paying attention to what they were doing. Then they started talking to me again about the full-length. It turned out we liked a lot of the same things. We're all the same age. We had an understanding of how music feels, the colors of it. And it's cool because they have their own sound. So it's not like something where I have to take it up to a bar. It's already well above. What I can bring takes it even further, magnifying what they have. Their preparation has been extraordinary. They not only know their individual parts and how to play them well, but they know how to play together extremely well. The feel, the touch, the nuances. There's a lot of detail, even when the music's at its most simple.

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 LaSalle Power Company

They have a sound they've created on their own, so all I have to do is document that to do my job well. As a producer I just have to bring my fresh ear, get them to look at things from different angles. Everyone's got a high standard for this project, everyone wants to get to the next level. I'm feeling the songs and that doesn't happen all the time, for every song to be good with a full-length. I could listen to them all day and enjoy it. That's a big bonus. Liking the songs, liking the style, liking the swagger.

#### **Same question for the band, but reversed: What's it been like working with Brian?**

**Sean:** The attention to total detail has been a really big difference. His attention to detail has colored the record in a different way than we might have colored it on our own.

**Eric:** It's colored it in the most natural way possible.

**John:** Another thing that's really helped us along is that everybody has clearly defined roles. The relationship between band and producer is really clear cut. And everybody understands that, yes, we made the music, but there's a lot of things that are beyond our control and as a musician. Letting somebody take it to the next level is what has made it so special.

**Sean:** It's hard to let go. You're trusting somebody to take it to the next level. We've been rewarded for giving that trust to Brian.

**Brian:** I see such an opportunity in working with King Sparrow because of what I enjoy in their art. It gives me a great chance to do my best art. It's fun. This is what I've always wanted to do, my whole life.

#### **Speaking of that, Brian, give us a bit of background. How did you start the studio and get to this point?**

**Brian:** I was in a band and started recording my own band's demos. Then I started recording local bands. I thought it was really cool to capture something that's real and then manipulate it into something beyond real. The science, the technology, the art and musicality.

The first band I did all the way through, start to finish, was The Academy Is... They ended up getting signed. Then I started recording all these emo bands. There was a big emo explosion in Chicago.

Then I just started buying a lot of gear. I worked with my friend out of his basement.

Now I've been trying to do more "timeless" stuff. But I still record whatever people call and want me to do. It's a craft. It's a trade. It's a job. I see the art in pretty much any genre. I try to approach every project by going with what the band totally wants and focusing that. Constantly seeking their approval and then pushing back. If I just did what I thought would be great with every record, they would all start sounding the same. I just want to make really cool sounding records that have something memorable and unique about them.

Chicago's not L.A., but it's big. It's not New York or Nashville, and there's this opportunity here. Maybe King Sparrow will be the next record out of here that gets people's attention on the city.

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**I hope so. As a band, what would you say is different about what you guys are doing?**

**Sean:** We're from a very similar time and place. There was a certain set of music we were into for a long period of time. We're all from the North side, all went to the same high school. We have such similar experiences that they overlap. We always have somewhere that's a common place that we all come from.

**Eric:** And we all went away and did completely different things for four or five years, and when we came back we all grew as musicians and people.

Song-wise, we like catchy hooks, we like dissonance. Trying to balance the two – have something that you grab on to right away, but then there's this weird shit and you're like, "what the hell?". If we do something that has a weird post-punky beat, I want to do more major chords to brighten it up. Finding that balance.

**John:** I think we definitely have made a focused effort to play to our strengths. A lot of times you find yourself wanting to explore and do these new things; I don't know if it's proving to yourself or to everyone else that you're that awesome, but you have to reign it in and do what you're best at. Really hone it. We have to make songs that we like. You can't please everyone all the time. It's not Christmas every day. So please yourself, and then when you play it for other people, hopefully that enthusiasm translates properly.

**Brian:** They'll feel something regardless, though.

**Eric:** Terror...

**John:** Disgust?

**Eric:** Disdain.

**Sean:** Confusion!

This is what we're going for. (laughs)

**Eric:** Molten shrapnel.

**Brian:** Yeah, that was sort of one of my themes. Aluminum molten shrapnel. Those guitars have some sort of cauterizing, fuckin' burning hot teeth. Not clean like a razor blade, but nasty like aluminum.

**The word nasty has come up a lot with this record.**

**Eric:** We had a board out there where we grouped our songs into different categories. There was "nasty" and "poppy" and "'60s-slash-weird." That's the record.

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Brian, Sean, John and Eric at Gallery of Carpet studio

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POSTED BY FRANK ON FRIDAY, JULY 30, 2010

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