

DAVID *dog days*
ULLMAN

BIO/ALBUM
NOTES

Dog Days, the much-anticipated first full-length album from Northeast Ohio singer/songwriter David Ullman, finally reached an eager audience in February 2008. Most often cited for his poignant use of vocal dynamics and intimate portraits of love lost and (occasionally) found, Ullman delivered a debut that *Free Times* music editor Jeff Niesel calls “exquisitely beautiful” and *Cool Cleveland*’s Peter Chakerian describes as “deep, dark and intensely rich.”

The 29-year-old Clevelander’s initial creative outlet was filmmaking, though pre-adolescent re-makes of biopics like *La Bamba* and *The Buddy Holly Story* sparked his interest in music as well. “I started playing guitar at age eight by learning Buddy Holly songs—most of which are the same four chords,” he recalls. “Buddy Holly for me was what punk rock seems to have been for a lot of other musicians. You don’t have to be Eric Clapton to play along with The Ramones. That’s the way it was with me and Buddy Holly’s music. My dad taught me to play his songs, and I used to make tapes in my bathroom—overdubbing my voice like I’d seen in the movies. I also drew covers for the tapes based on other album sleeves that I’d seen, and gave them to my family for birthday gifts and such.”

In his early twenties, Ullman and a handful of friends formed a short-lived folk-rock quintet called “Steve.” Songs such as “Start Anew” and “Unspoken,” both of which appear on *Dog Days*, were written during this time, and Ullman’s long-time friend, collaborator, and former Steve member Matthew Jackson designed the disc’s cover. Other carryovers from the group include Steve bassist Nick Robinson, who features on the final (unlisted) track of *Dog Days*, key contributors Sean Kammer (piano) and Logan Ramsier (drums), as well as the engineering expertise of (brother) Brian Ullman, who also plays lead and bass guitar on the record.

Ullman’s insistence upon the inclusion of these valued individuals turned the making of *Dog Days* into a three-year-process—during which time he refined the songs on stage, performing over 90 shows in 2007. “Why would I hastily make a plain ol’ voice-and-guitar record when my brother is a terrific producer and electric guitar player? It wouldn’t make any sense,” he explains. “My friends and I may not be the best musicians ever; but for me, we were the right musicians to realize this material. In my mind, it had to be these people. Even down to the name of the label that I established to release the CD—Dreaming Out Loud Records. For ten years now, Dreaming Out Loud ventures have involved these people. It’s about making dreams reality, and I was committed to waiting for these people and what they could contribute to these songs.”

Not only do the tracks on *Dog Days* invite listeners into Ullman’s life and relationships, but also into the homes of his family and friends through intimate recording sessions that took place in bedrooms, bathrooms, and basements. Or perhaps, we as listeners invite *him* into *our* living rooms and lives—to play his guitar on our couches and hang out in our kitchens.

Hearing Ullman's music feels less like listening to a recording or attending a concert and more like sitting down with an old friend on a Friday night to rehash the rough day at work or the latest lovers' quarrel. His honest and confessional style brings him a special kind of rapport with his audience. He gives voice to those universal fears that most of us prefer not to examine—fears that our relationships may not be the safe haven we once believed them to be.

Still, the music of *Dog Days* goes beyond the traditional break-up record. A hopeful message persists and shines through the adversity, and there's a struggle to maintain and repair the relationship that hangs in the balance. Ullman's shift from smooth and gentle—at times pleading—lyrics, to the explosive and emotionally charged heights that characterize both his songwriting and live performances draw us into the conversation, assuring us all that we have friends with whom to share our everyday struggles, ambitions and disappointments.

Currently maintaining a consistent concert schedule in and around Northeastern Ohio, Ullman is eager to travel to new cities. In the months ahead, look for him to branch out into new territories in support of his debut album and its forthcoming second single, a radio remix of "Secondhand," which will be released alongside several outtakes from *Dog Days*.

TM Göttl, Summer 2008

Dog Days Track Listing

1. Begin
2. Secondhand
3. Half-light
4. Start Anew
5. Déjà vu
6. If You Can
7. Coming To
8. Let Go
9. Unspoken
10. In Dreams
11. You and I



<http://www.davidullman.net>

For more information please contact David at dju@davidullman.net

From a whisper to a scream

David Ullman's therapeutic songwriting



TONIGHT AT MUGGSWIGZ "I tend to write in spurts, or when I've got something I need to express – something to come to terms with, simply acknowledge, or try to work out," says singer-songwriter David Ullman.

BY DAN KANE
REPOSITORY ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

David Ullman is a bracing alternative on the sometimes sleepy coffeehouse circuit.

"I tend to vary between singing very softly one moment to bellowing and hollering the next," the Kent-based singer-songwriter says.

Tonight from 8 to 11, Ullman will perform at Muggswigz Coffee & Tea Co. at 137 Walnut Ave. NE in downtown Canton. The last time he played there, some enthusiastic audience members joined him onstage.

Because many people go to coffeehouses to socialize or study, Ullman, 27, says it "makes it all the more fulfilling when I'm able to reach them.

"The fact that some of the audience is not there to see me perform can be a bit awkward sometimes. If they are there for the music, the proximity tends to heighten the intimacy of the songs."

About his diverse collection of original songs, Ullman says, "Some tend to be very mellow and reserved, while others are

loud and edgy. It's not uncommon for all of that to be going on in one song."

Ullman, who accompanies himself on guitar, felt the songwriting urge early on.

"I wrote songs as a kid, inspired by '50s rock and roll," he recalls. "Then, about 13 years later, I found myself playing music with a few friends. Everyone was writing songs, and I wanted to contribute. I wrote a couple of tunes for that project, and that got me in the mindset. Two of the songs I wrote while in that band have ended up on the CD I've been recording, which should come out by year's end."

From the sound of it, Ullman's songwriting can be therapeutic. "Most all of my songs mean a great deal to me," he says. "Many have been borne out of some sort of trauma; and as such, were integral to my working through whatever was eating me."

To sample Ullman's music and see a video, visit www.myspace.com/davidullmanmusic and www.davidullman.net.

Stirring the Quiet

story by: theresa wolfe

photos by: lesley katzenmeyer

Singer-songwriter David Ullman's music leads listeners down a meandering path into his simple, soulful world

It's Bring Your Own Beer — or Wine — night at Sonnet's Coffee House & Café in Wadsworth, Ohio. Musician David Ullman, senior electronic media production major, holds up a wine bottle to his audience.

"It was good. So good, it's gone," he says, and sets the bottle down on a table beside him on the stage.

Ullman begins to strum his Martin acoustic guitar, holding it as comfortably as he wears his faded jeans. A stray lock of his brown, tousled hair falls forward as he half-closes his eyes and lets his head lean toward the guitar.

As he sings to the groups scattered at tables, conversation drops off and faces turn to the stage.

Alone on the tiny corner stage nestled against the storefront window, Ullman loosely modulates his voice from pin-drop softness to soul-tearing intensity.

*Memory is like a loaded gun,
fighting battles we know can't be won.*

In closing the show, he dedicates the last song to his father, Jim, who has come to hear his son play tonight.

"I'm going to leave you with a favorite Canadian song," Ullman says. "It's kind of a broken lullaby, but

it makes me feel kind of warm. My Dad is the one who taught me how to sing, and it's because of that the song kind of goes right through me."

The former pastor and his wife, Sara, hold hands at their table as their son croons the bittersweet lyrics of Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah."

When David was born, his parents realized they could not both raise a family and commit to keeping a full-time role in the church. His father stepped down as pastor and stopped leading the congregation on guitar in worship music during services.

"I made a prayer," the elder Ullman says. "I really felt the ministry and the music was my passion, but that if I laid it down, God would give it back to me through my children. I'm seeing things in them now, and know it did come back to me. Their music is almost spiritual."

Making tracks

Ullman, 28, stands in a room scattered with music equipment at his parents' house in Rittman, his hometown. He's preparing for a recording session with his younger brother, Brian.

He lifts an eyebrow and smiles when asked to describe his music.

"The articulate version, I have on my Web site. I wrote it myself," Ullman says. "Brooding, sad music with an underlying

optimism.' I stand by that. People don't always see the optimism, though."

Cradling headphones with both hands, he leans into the microphone set up on the limited floor space that's available amid chairs, bureaus and tables. The unlikely surroundings serve the purpose of a recording studio as he lays tracks for his first full-length CD, *Dog Days*. Ullman released a four-song EP, *Déjà Vu*, in December 2006.

"I remember that when I wrote the song 'Unspoken,' it felt like growth," Ullman says after singing a few lines to check the sound. "Then, as far as newer cycle songs, 'Déjà vu' felt personal. That's the first song that I thought I was on to something. I've been chasing that for the last three years."

"And we're getting pretty close," Brian says as he enters the room, closing the door to the makeshift studio behind him. Brian, also a guitarist and accomplished musician, has a background as a sound recording engineer.

"Get out of his way — he's going somewhere," Brian says as he straps on a bass guitar.

Word of mouth

In Fall 2005, Ullman began playing monthly at Susan's Coffee & Tea in Kent. He had just returned from North Carolina where he was attending college as an English major. He began



working toward the same degree when he started at Kent State that semester.

"I couldn't stomach the climate of academia," Ullman says. "Just the, 'You have to have a doctorate to write it, and you have to have a doctorate to understand it' — I don't have the patience for that. I was pretty intellectually agile, and enjoyed that, but I was really an English major to have a guided tour through great books."

Having spent years making and editing his own movies, Ullman changed his major to electronic media production.

"I would do things in a professional manner because I wanted them to be good," he says of his film projects.

As he became a familiar face at Susan's, Ullman began to build a base of enthusiastic listeners.

"Last semester, he was in one of my classes," says Becky Grabski, junior political science major. "I went to a coffee shop where his show was, and I was so amazed and taken away because I loved his music. He's so soulful that you know it's genuinely art."

Grabski frequently goes to the Northside, a club in Akron, to hear Ullman play.

"I always bring, like, five to 10

friends every time I go see him, just because I think people should know about his music," Grabski says. "And they all go home happy."

Jeff Gargas, business management major and president of Akron-based FTF Records, says he first learned of Ullman's music through a flier posted for a show at the Robin Hood.

"I thought it was someone coming through the area at the time because the flier looked so professional," he says.

Gargas has since worked with Ullman in arranging shows at regional venues. He describes the music as "very emotional."

"He speaks to anyone," Gargas says. "You get the feeling, when he's playing, that he's in his own world when he's on stage. To me, that's how you can spot a true artist. He's both real and extremely humble, which is unfortunately hard to find in a lot of cases."

Widening audience

Ullman has been interviewed for area broadcasts, both online and on the radio. In May he appeared on 91.3 WAPS, "The Summit," for Jim Chenot's "Radio Sandbox."

The spotlight on his music widened in August. Two local newspapers, *The Canton Repository* and *The Post*, a newspaper based mostly in Medina County, published stories profiling Ullman. He also drew attention on the Internet the same month.

"David's got a really good, earthy, organic quality to his recording, but it's also very professional," said Jana Pochop, Indie-Music.com staff writer, after reviewing his *Déjà Vu* EP. "His songwriting is very honest. He's got a good sense of humor, and very singable lines and melodies."

Next up

With recording wrapped up and production on the way, Ullman's *Dog Days* CD will contain 12 songs, all of which he wrote.

Ullman's music takes the listener to a place inside that's so distinct, it's almost a geographic location — a place you might be able to visit if someone told you which road to take when you get to the edge of town.

From bright shooting stars to blackened sky how did we get here, you and I? 

Kent singer Ullman sets show to release CD

Will perform Saturday at Musica in Akron



Lisa Scalfaro/Record-Courier
Kent folk singer David Ullman will perform Saturday at Musica in Akron to celebrate the release of his first full-length CD, "Dog Days."

Ullman track on www.recordpub.com

Kent-area folk musician David Ullman will release a new album "Dog Days," at Musica on Maiden Lane in downtown Akron. Cover charge is \$10 but also includes a copy of the album. The show begins at 8 p.m.

To sample a track from the new album visit www.RecordPub.com. For more on Ullman, visit his Web site at www.DavidUllman.net.

By Matt Fredmonsky
Record-Courier staff writer
Thursday, February 21, 2008

Saturday at Musica in Akron fans of Kent folk singer David Ullman will get a two for one deal — admission to his CD release party for "Dog Days" and a copy of the album for \$10.

Ullman, a Kent State University student, will graduate in May with a degree in electronic media production and two releases under his belt as a local musician. The Rittman native resides in Cleveland but plays mostly in the Kent and Akron area.

His first release, "Deja Vu," came in 2006 and featured four tracks. Two of those songs, "Deja Vu" and "Secondhand," reappear on the eleven track "Dog Days" to be released for the first time to the public Saturday.

The folk musician yet self-described rock singer said the show will be a celebration of the culmination of the album.

"In my mind, I've been pregnant with this thing for three years and I'm just giving birth," Ullman said.

Lost Love

Lamenting the loss of a cherished intimacy is a recurring theme on Ullman's first full-length album. But there are also hints of an underlying optimism, Ullman said.

"That's the overriding theme," he said. "There's certainly an aspect of trying to hang on to things."

Track 11, titled "You and I," is the closing piece and includes some of his perhaps most poignant lyrics about waning relationships.

It used to be so simple so sweet, I loved you and you loved me ... Sadly, I know what lives must die How did we get here, you and I

But track three, "Half light," Ullman said is more a story of recognizing when you have something good.

Through the lyrics, Ullman reveals a lot about his personal life.

As for the album title itself, "Dog Days," Ullman didn't nail down any one inspiration.

"It's applicable to anything you want to associate it with," he said. "It's something that took so many years to make I don't think you can tie it to any one specific time."

Together or Solo?

Fans who catch his monthly appearances at Susan's Coffee and Tea on East Main Street in Kent may be surprised to see a full band backing him Saturday, let alone hear the fuller sound on "Dog Days."

"Generally it's me," Ullman said. "So they may not even like the record. But I think they will."

Ullman's strong vocal conviction and acoustic guitar presence on the new album will remain this weekend, but the bass guitar and drum backing from the disc will be markedly different in comparison to the live sound.

The album, which came together during three years of recording, features his brother, Brian, on electric guitar and includes friends Logan Ramsier on drums and keyboardist Sean Kammer. Saturday, he will appear with Jeff Gargas and Brian Yost, who originally play bass and drums in NJs and the Jeff, along with his brother.

Having his brother, Gargas and Yost behind him Saturday to recreate the album will help give those songs the momentum they deserve, Ullman said. Brian Ullman will recreate his electric guitar lines from the album, but Yost and Gargas won't try to copy the bass and drum tracks laid down on the record.

"As a band, we kind of came up with our own arrangements," Ullman said.

Though the foursome is billed as Sad Bastards for Saturday, even Ullman is hesitant in describing the group as a band, as they have no additional planned appearances together — yet.

"I hope to," Ullman said. "It's just kind of a no-pressure thing. It's more a loose arrangement."

Musical Past and Future

Like most aspiring musicians, Ullman is hopeful to continue making music — as long as he remains in-

spired to do so. Unlike many musicians, Ullman does not want to make a living at it.

"Whatever your job is, you come to resent it from a certain degree," he said. "I guess I'm not willing to make those sacrifices. I'll do it as long as I'm inspired to."

His father, Jim, taught he and his brother to play guitar at an early age. The 28-year-old has now developed his own small recording label, Dreaming Out Loud Records.

Ullman has grown to enjoy the road-trip aspect of playing live shows. But he has witnessed the difficulties his brother has endured in trying to keep a band together and functioning.

The musician would rather maintain a day job in his educated field while playing the occasional, nightly gig.

"I'd rather do it on my own terms," he said.

Weekender

Kent Stage takes music outside

David Ullman will perform at 5 p.m. Saturday outside The Kent Stage during the Heritage Festival.



Bands to perform Saturday during Heritage Festival

RECORD-COURIER
Thursday, July 3, 2008

The sounds of The Kent Stage will be moving outdoors for Kent's annual Heritage Festival on Saturday.

Music will be provided by a mix of young rock bands & Woody's Rock School alumni as well as a seasoned folk veteran in Brad Bolton and one of the region's aspiring musicians, David Ullman.

Case Sensitive will perform four times during the festival. Case Sensitive members include Lucas Kadish, 13, on guitar, keyboard and vocals; Anthony Minerovic, 15, on bass; and Chris Carlson, 15, on saxophone and keyboard. All members are from Hudson. The band also will have guest drummers throughout the day including Brian Merriman of Kent,

Eros Caso of Hudson, Eric Hartung of Kent, and Tyler Gladioux of Green.

Case Sensitive will play music by Frank Zappa, Yes, King Crimson, Rush, Led Zeppelin, Ted Nugent, The Who, Alice Cooper, Steely Dan, Red Hot Chili Peppers and original tunes.

Monotypical, including Lucas Kadish on drums/vocals, Anthony Minerovic on bass and Matt Chambers, 15, of Canton will perform twice. Monotypical plays a mixture of Red Hot Chili Peppers, Rush, Van Halen, Beck, King Crimson and Zappa.

Brad Bolton of Kent will join Kadish for a set of folk-oriented songs at 4:15 p.m.

David Ullman, an up-and-coming rock/folk singer/songwriter from Cleveland,

will present a set of songs from his latest CD, "Dog Days" at 5 p.m.

The schedule is as follows:

11:30 a.m.: Monotypical

12:30 p.m.: Case Sensitive

1 p.m.: Case Sensitive (all Zappa set)

2 p.m.: Monotypical

3 p.m.: Case Sensitive

4:15 p.m.: Lucas Kadish and Brad Bolton

5 p.m.: David Ullman

7 p.m.: Case Sensitive

In case of inclement weather, performances will be moved into The Kent Stage.

Information provided by www.kentstage.org.

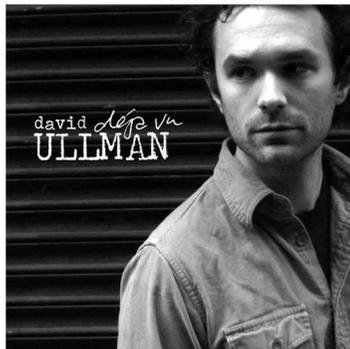
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David Ullman ~ *Deja Vu*

Date: Saturday, August 04, 2007 @ 01:32:00 EDT

By: Jana Pochop



Deja Vu is a strong EP from David Ullman, or as he calls himself, the "sad b-a-s-t-a-r-d solo singer-songwriter" (dashes added by author to avoid you all seeing "*****"). I always thought it was funny that if any other professional staked a claim with a tag-line like "Barry Smith -- sad b-a-s-t-a-r-d accountant!" ... that would probably not go over so well. But for a folk singer? It's perfect. Ullman delivers on his tag line with some sweet-yet melancholy tunes as well as one that lives up to the ... well, the b-a-s-t-a-r-d part. But it works well.

The title track is a sing-alongable lament with snappy guitar work and tight production. *Deja Vu* would stand head to head with any Howie Day or Matt Nathanson tune and fit right in, though David's music has that tinge of loneliness that makes it easy to relate. (Well, I think most people would relate. Maybe I'm just bitter and lonely). "I can feel it coming 'round again, love, begin just to end again," captures that inevitable feeling of "been there done that we're doomed" in a new relationship.

Deja Vu transitions well into "Secondhand," in which Ullman pleads, "I need a secondhand heart, only slightly ripped apart ... give me someone who will never let me down." He's not asking a whole lot in the grand scheme of things, and the humbleness works within the subtle desperation. Again the production works well with the song, adding a ringing acoustic melody and good percussive beat to Ullman's strong vocals that are almost reminiscent of the vocal quality of Sting (in a good way).

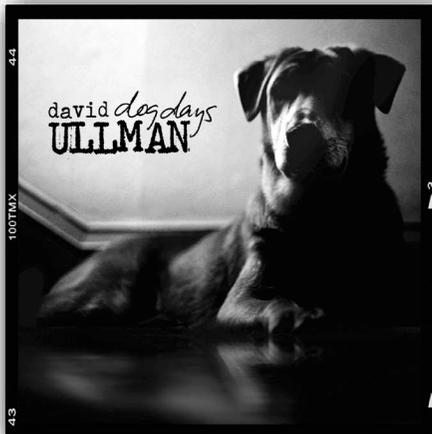
"Snakebit" ... this song has the line, "I hate to complain, I know I got it good" -- but then it rips into a plethora of observations and complaints about the world at large. Ullman's just doing his job as a songwriter with this track, pointing out all the incongruousness of life in an interesting way. Following suit but getting more specific, the last track, "Mulletman," ("He's so handsome, sugar sweet, treats you like a piece of meat") is a nice lambasting of those jerks who know they can get any girl and are even jerkier because of it. It's a song borne of jealousy but could also actually serve as a public service announcement. Listen to David, girls. Guys like Mulletman aren't worth it, and if you can get your dose of reality in an entertaining way from David Ullman's closing track, all the better. Ullman ultimately offers up a good slice of life on this acoustic EP, and a little "sad b-a-s-t-a-r-d" never hurt anyone ... it just might help get you through the day.

Artist Website: <http://www.davidullman.net>

The URL for this story is:

<http://www.indie-music.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=6308>

Dog Days **David Ullman** **Dreaming Out Loud**



There's something familiar and comforting about David Ullman's first full-length effort, *Dog Days*. And perhaps even something *familial*. Listening to his 11-track release feels like running into an old friend after many years and sharing a moment over coffee. With a decidedly Triple-A format sound (acoustic folk with poignant electric decoration) and an approach that summons Damien Rice and Dog's Eye View frontman Peter Stuart, Ullman goes straight for the heart; his coffeehouse style is exquisitely flattering.

Deft wordplay, intimate introspection and a focus on relationships emerge early on, with Ullman crooning *I need a secondhand heart/ Only slightly ripped apart/ I need someone who will always be around/ Unrequited from the start/ Feel I was born to play the part/ Give me someone who will never let me down.* on "Secondhand Heart."

Ullman's got a toasty voice, chock full of emotion and the musical arrangements and high-quality production do well to push it front and center. As a result, cuts like "Begin," "Déjà Vu," "Half-Light" and brilliantly silky, heartbroken "Coming To" simply smolder. More espresso than latte, *Dog Days* is deep, dark and intensely rich. Worth a refill, to be sure.

Hear a sample of Ullman's "Déjà Vu" by clicking [here](#).

David Ullman & the Sad Bastards celebrate the release of *Dog Days* with a CD release party and show Saturday, February, 23 at Musica, 17 Maiden Lane, Akron. Price of admission gets you a free copy of *Dog Days* -- plus an evening of entertainment featuring sets by:

Abby Kondas (<http://www.myspace.com/abbykondasmusic>),

[David's brother Brian Ullman] (<http://www.myspace.com/fascistpuppeteer>) and Ullman and his band.

Visit David Ullman online at <http://www.davidullman.net> and on MySpace at <http://www.myspace.com/davidullmanmusic>.

From *Cool Cleveland* Managing Editor Peter Chakerian peter@coolcleveland.com



"Dog Days" by David Ullman

Author: **Brittany Brown**

Published: **May 31, 2008**

Acoustic performer David Ullman released his debut album, "Dog Days" in 2008. Smooth and honest, this album is a must-have for any acoustic fan.

The term "dog days" never implies good things. Usually it brings to mind the unforgivably hot afternoons of late summer—the merciless flies, the humidity, the food gone bad, and the perseverance of brown grass, despite the fanatical attentions of persnickety homeowners. But David Ullman's *Dog Days* just might make those seemingly-forsaken weeks a little easier to bear. Intelligently emotional and unabashedly candid, the debut release from the scruffy singer/songwriter is leaving fresh marks in the world of underground folk.

Overview

Dog Days is a gracefully raw confession of the heart. Ullman's slightly gravelly vocals, which crescendo from the barest whisper to a barely-controlled roar, lend the album an air of sincerity that is enhanced by the limited yet effective instrumentation. Relying primarily on voice and guitar can be a risk to take when it comes to a debut album—even when said artist routinely flies solo and only armed with a guitar-- but one would hardly expect less than greatness from the Cleveland-based performer. The shadows of piano, electric guitar, and percussion accompaniment only serve to enhance what Ullman has perfected on his own. Ullman is a true romantic who wears his heart on his sleeve without being annoyingly cliché.

Go-To Tracks

"Déjà Vu", one of Ullman's most popular songs, brings up old memories of long-ago loves who appear out of nowhere and leave just as abruptly. Its simplistic guitar rhythm and subtle piano arrangement make it easily a tune that will stick like honey to the brain for countless days. The first song on the album, "Begin", is strategically placed; with an upbeat outlook and driving acoustic work, it leaves even the most skeptical of listeners wanting more. A bit darker than the rest, "In Dreams" is brooding and addictive, with electric guitar accents to emphasize its beautiful decadence. "Halflight" magnificently exploits Ullman's range and utilizes that signature "roar", combining it with prominent percussion that will make this track a sure hit.

Last Thoughts

Ullman's most valuable asset is his ability to relate to his audience. Every person who has ever attempted anything resembling a relationship can relate to the extreme highs, the obliterating lows, and the hazy feelings in between that Ullman hits in his songs. Not just an album for lovers, not just an album for the broken-hearted, it is an album that transcends multiple classifications and stereotypes, and is simply a good idea for anyone, anywhere.

Q&A

David talks about the making of *Dog Days*.

Q: Tell me a little bit about why you started recording an album.

A: The title, *Dog Days*, is as old as any of the songs. The first song that I wrote and recorded was “Déjà vu.” I did a demo of that, and the demo gave me confidence enough to think ‘okay I’m gonna take some of these other ideas I have for songs and make an album.’ It wasn’t really like I found myself with a collection of songs. It was almost that I developed some ideas for songs for the purpose of making an album.

I think that part of it is that I’m programmed to do long-form works. I definitely think that my background in making films and telling stories came into play. As soon as I had more than one song to my name, I knew I’d make an album.

Q: What was your inspiration?

A: It is definitely in the tradition of break-up records (laughs). I had some songs that spoke to different aspects of, not necessarily the end of a relationship, but different shades and colors of a relationship.

There was a relationship between some of the early songs. “Déjà vu” was there; “Begin” was there, and already there were some repeating phrases. They started to establish that kind of symbiotic relationship.

Especially having set out to make an album, as opposed to just recording a song or two, there’s this idea in the back of your head of what the whole is going to be. Certain elements assert themselves, and it becomes that cliché about sculpture where you strip away everything that’s not part of what it is you’re trying to say.

Q: Is this album intended for someone going through a breakup?

A: Not intentionally. I did, yes, set out to make an album before I necessarily even had songs enough to support it, but there was never an imaginary audience.

I’ve always just made what I needed to make, and I’ve always responded best to people whose work has this urgency in it. I tend to like desperate voices, people communicating something because they have to get it out.

There is a sense in which I deliberately set out to make an album, but it definitely came from a need within me to express something. It was a natural evolution of something I needed to make evolving into something I could envision other people enjoying. I’m still making it for myself. I’m making it to express what I need to in a way that satisfies me, but for the first time there is an awareness of the fact that it could be embraced by other people. I felt like, for the first time in my life, I belonged in the larger conversation.

Q: Talk a little bit about the people involved in this album and how they've helped you.

A: Other people around me were also making recordings. My friend Sean Kammer was making an EP of songs in North Carolina, and my brother Brian was recording rock songs in his friend's basement studio —making strides in engineering and the production end of things.

My plan was to record a song with each of them, to learn how they were getting the results that they were getting, and then apply what I learned working with them to completing everything on my own.

I began with “Unspoken,” which was a song that I started to record when I was in the band Steve with Sean, and then I started to record with my brother Brian.

Brian and I recorded four songs in a couple of weeks—maybe a month. It was so exciting. He was really invested in the engineering. He was running live sound at a club at night, and recording during the day with his friend Jason. The songs that I recorded with Brian came out so well that the bar was raised for the rest of the project. I think I spent the next three years trying to either recapture that time—or at least live up to that quality.

The reason that it then took another three years is due in large part to wanting make the record I wanted to make with the people I wanted to make it with. My friends and I may not be the best musicians ever; but for me, we were the right musicians to realize this material.

It just seemed silly to me. Why would I make a voice-and-guitar record when my brother is a terrific producer and electric guitar player? It wouldn't make any sense.

I think anytime anybody sets out to make an album, they want to best represent the songs that they have at the time for what their current capabilities are. I always see things in terms of what's possible—both from a realistic standpoint, but also from an idealistic slant.

I have people around me with certain abilities. I know Sean can play enough piano to do a track if we wanted to. I know my brother can pretty much play along with anything and elevate the whole track by his playing—even if it's an improvisational take. I knew if I could just capture him for an hour and make him record something, I knew I could get something great.

Also, I wanted them to be a part of it. Like my friend Logan who plays drums on the album. Logan loves to play the drums, and I knew Logan would get a real charge out of being involved in something like this.

However, over the course of recording the album, Logan had two kids—plus he has a career. Sean moved to Nebraska at one point, and we would mail CDs back-and-forth or upload them to a server.

People's lives are hectic, but my vision for these recordings was so wrapped up in these other people. I couldn't just go off and record with anybody who could play an instrument. In my mind, it had to be these people. Even down to the name of the record label that I established to release the CD—Dreaming Out Loud Records. Dreaming Out Loud ventures have always been these people. It's about making your dreams reality. People's lives ebb and flow, and I was committed to waiting for these people and what they could bring to these songs.

Q: You did not record in a studio. Where did you record?

A: In the same way that it would have been foolish of me to make an album without taking stock of who is around me and what they can bring to the table, I also had to approach it asking "What do I have access to, and what don't I have access to?" I do have access to some great players. I don't have access to a professional studio or the money to rent a professional studio, so that was never a consideration. I'm making really intimate songs, with pretty intimate arrangements, so all I really need is a good microphone and a good performance and a quiet space to do it in.

Those quiet spaces for me were bathrooms and bedrooms and basements—those of myself, my parents and my friends. The studio, as it were, was whatever room we were currently setting the microphones up in.

Different rooms have different characteristics. The bathroom has great natural reverb. I did a lot of guitar work and even some singing in the bathroom. "Start Anew" was all recorded in the bathroom of my apartment. Most of the drums were recorded in the basement of my parents' house—though one time I did go to Logan's house in Columbus.

It was sort of a traveling studio—except the studio was just my PC and a couple of microphones.

Q: What do you hope to have people take from this album after they've listened to it?

A: That's a very hard question to answer because it just never enters into my thoughts. It's really just something that I needed to make, so anything that happens beyond that is just icing on the cake I suppose.

I've also thought about it like I've been pregnant for three years (laughs). I'm very process-oriented, but the real journey starts once the album is completed. That's the child and you take the child out into the world to grow up. I'll kind of be there to hold its hand you know, taking it around the country in the back of my car (laughs)!

Q: What have you gotten. After this three-year journey, what have you learned or taken away?

A: I'm glad that it wasn't something that we could make in two months. The album that would have been made in early 2005 would not have been nearly as good as I feel this is. That's both because the songs themselves evolved. After about a year, I started to play out live, and that helped a lot of the songs and helped me become a better singer. The whole thing kind of matured over time.

I've certainly grown over the last three years, and some of that is reflected in songs that were written later in the recording process. All of the songs are mediations on either grieving the loss of a relationship, or trying to work it out—to hang onto it. Then there are other times that things can't work out. Different understandings of those situations are reflected in different songs. I don't really write about promiscuity or anything like that. I tend to write about wanting to hold onto things and people that are dear to you.

I work things out through the songs. If it's a really angry song, I needed a place to put that anger. I'm not somebody that takes out that kind of thing on other people. I don't play sports; I sing songs. The songs are how I process the world around me, and this particular collection of songs is a focused one.

I may never make another album again; but if I do, it won't be this album. It won't be another batch of songs about the drama of romantic relationships.

I tend to write from a fetal position, like after you've been kicked. Songwriting is my reaction; it's my outlet. There are a lot of painful things represented in the content of the songs, but there's also a lot of healing that's brought about through writing, recording and taking them out into the world and sharing them with people. You end up connecting with other people through the music and turning a negative into a positive.

[Interview with Will Dages, Fall 2007]