

Q & A with

Jack White

The Dead Weather

Alison Mosshart, Jack White, Dean Fertita, Jack Lawrence

Jack White hates to wait. And it's anyone's guess whether he sleeps like the rest of us mortals. Since early 2008 he has released a second record with the Raconteurs, *Consolers of the Lonely*, and finished a U.S. and European tour. He has also produced "Another Way to Die," the theme song for the latest James Bond flick *Quantum of Solace*, which he sang with Alicia Keys. Already in 2009 White unveiled the new Third Man Studio and Third Man Records building in Nashville. Additionally, he's trumpeted the formation of his third band, the Dead Weather, featuring Alison Mosshart of the Kills on vocals, Dean Fertita of Queens of the Stone Age on guitar, Jack Lawrence of the Raconteurs on bass, and White on drums, vocals and producing duties. Their debut album, *Horehound*, will be released in June. In *MC's* exclusive interview, White enthuses about all of his ventures, especially his new studio setup and a special 7" vinyl release with the Dex Romweber Duo.

Music Connection: You have a female front person in the Dead Weather. How did that come about? And in what ways is it different for you?

Jack White: This was at the end of the touring we did with the Raconteurs and the Kills. So we had one day left in Nashville. I said, "Well, why don't you come to the studio and let's do a 7" together." Me, her, and Little Jack on bass. And Dean just happened to be staying in town, so he wandered in and the four of us started playing together with the intention of just putting out a 7" through Third Man Records. We ended up writing more songs, and it ended up being enough to start thinking, "maybe this should be an album! Maybe this should be a band!"

MC: Does it feel any different having a woman up front?

White: It feels incredible. I love collaborating with women, as you can see in the past with Loretta Lynn, Alicia Keys, Meg White. It shows people what both sexes can bring to the table as performers and songwriters too.

MC: What inspired you to get behind the drum kit again?

White: It was the producing on the James Bond track. I did that from the drummer's chair with Alicia [Keys].

MC: So you wanted to have a similar experience with the Dead Weather?

White: I said, "I want to do this more through this new system I'm setting up where you can put out a record in a matter of weeks. We can have a 7" vinyl come out through Third Man Records and at the same time put out the MP3 on iTunes digitally for sale and on the Third Man Records website. I could produce a band, we can go to the Third Man building, take the photographs, even develop them in the darkroom I built in the Third Man building. Make the record though the offices, press them up at United [Record] Pressing plant, which is a few blocks from our building in Nashville, and then sell the record at the Third Man record store in front of the building three weeks later and sell it on iTunes the same day." And we're doing that. There are about five or six records in the pipeline right now that are about to come out.

MC: How many employees do you have at Third Man Records?

White: We have three or four now. There will probably be more by next year.

MC: Who are some of the artists on your label we can look forward to hearing from soon?

White: Well, some I can't tell you about yet, but there are a couple of new artists right now that are coming out very soon with 7" singles and MP3 singles on iTunes. One is named Mildred, sort of this gothy, milquetoast girl from Kentucky, and another one is Rachele Garniez who is this brilliant accordion player, pianist, songwriter who is just incredible, and she is doing a one song 7". The B-side has nothing on it. I play drums on Rachele's record as well. I produced both of those.

MC: What do you look for in new artists?

White: I just want something to be real and soulful and express something with character. Shockingly, that's hard to find.

MC: Do you have someone who scouts talent for the label?

White: No, just me. Actually, people at the Third Man building are also looking around all the time.

MC: What kind of deals do you offer?

White: Right now I'm really trying to get involved in just 7" deals. Two-song singles. Classic 45 and MP3 versions as well. So it's incorporating the modern and the old into one new ideal. It also incorporates [the concept behind] the studios of the Chess Records era and Sun [Records] where the producer is very involved and it's just one record. It's not an album project. In the next year, I hope to see more famous artists coming to do this — just do one or two songs through this system and put it out.

"I was worried that maybe some of the ideas I put into the building of the studio might not work. There are a lot of unique things that you can't find at any other studio that I can't even tell you about that are in there... We're recording at 7½. And that's extremely strange to do, but I think that all adds to the uniqueness of the sound of the studio."

—**Jack White**
about his new Third Man Studios

MC: Can you talk a little bit more about your photo studio?

White: The photo studio is in the building as well. It has infinity walls to film on and behind the walls is a darkroom. It's also in the same room as the performance stage. You can put on shows there and also practice for tour. A band can practice lighting and monitoring mixes. And it's large enough to hold about 300 people to put on a show.

MC: What was the recording process like for *Horehound*?

White: Fast. That's the way I like to do it. We didn't have any songs and then we had an 11-song album in three weeks. We wrote everything in the studio, and it's all recorded on 8-track, which is just not being done anymore.

MC: What was that songwriting process like?

White: It was incredible because all four members were bringing it to the table and everybody was doing everything. There's a song called "3 Birds," an instrumental where all four of us play guitar on the song. There are writing combinations that I don't think anybody would have thought of beforehand. Like Alison and Dean Fertita writing together on several of the songs. For a lot of the songs I have no part in the songwriting. I'm just the drummer.

MC: So you recorded *Horehound* in your new studio. What was that experience like? Were there any problems?

White: I was worried that maybe some of the ideas I put into the building of the studio might not work. There are a lot of unique things that you can't find at any other studio that I can't even tell you about that are in there. I don't have any pictures of it out yet. I really don't want to release any photos of that place because there are a lot of materials and techniques used that I haven't seen anywhere else. And I just can't believe how soulful it sounds when we play back the tape. It just feels perfect to me. It's the way I've wanted records to sound for years.

MC: Can you fill us in on one of the things you have?

White: [Laughs] Well, one thing I can definitely tell you about is an 8-track machine. A 2" 8-track. There are very few of these in the world that are this large. The head spaces are very large, so you can get extremely large bass tones to tape. And we record at the slowest speed possible, 7 ½" per second, which *nobody's* recording at. Even if people are using analog tape, they're recording at 30" per second. We're recording at 7 ½. And that's *extremely* strange to do, but I think that all adds to the uniqueness of the sound of the studio.

MC: Did you create your studio with your recording philosophy in mind?

White: For sure. I designed it as a producer. I took every piece of the puzzle and I took it extremely seriously. I micro-managed, down to the tiniest detail, how it was going to facilitate recording. I had an empty shell of building and we did it in six months.

MC: Can you give an example of something that you wanted to be a part of the studio that correlated with your feeling about recording? Was there something that you just had to have?

sideBAR: DEX ROMWEBER duo

In mid-May, the Bloodshot Records band Dex Romweber Duo met up with Jack White to lay down some tracks. The result is a 7" release in late May on White's newly formed label, Third Man.

Jack White has for years preached the Dex gospel. "Dex Romweber was and is a huge influence on my music. I owned all of his records as a teenager," White says. "[He is] one of the best kept secrets of the rock & roll underground." Twenty years ago, Dex's band, the Flat Duo Jets, were innovators, paving the way for contemporary guitar/drum duos like the Black Keys and the White Stripes.

The 7" session was a long time coming. In an interview with Metromix, Sara Romweber (drummer, Dex Romweber Duo,) described the scene. "At one point, Dex was in the room with his guitar and Jack was behind the control board. Jack had the biggest smile on his face and he said, 'You have no idea how long I've waited to hear that guitar tone in my studio.'"

The session took place at White's home studio in Nashville, TN. The record was produced by White and engineered by Grammy winner Vance Powell (the Raconteurs, the Dead Weather). The track listing can be found below.

The Dex Romweber Duo is now on the road with Bloodshot pals the Detroit Cobras, a tour spanning the U.S. The Duo's latest album, *Ruins of Berlin*, is out this spring.

Tracklisting and liner notes for the Third Man Records 7":

Side A: "Last Kind Word Blues" by Geeshie Wiley
Dex plays guitar, piano and sings the lead. Jack White plays acoustic guitar, lead guitar and sings a harmony lead vocal. Sara plays drums.

Side B: "The Wind Did Move" by Dex Romweber.

Dex plays guitar, organ and sings lead. Jack White plays bass, sings and plays the saw. Sara plays drums and tambourine.

Contact **Marah Eakin**, Bloodshot Records,
773-604-5300, marah@bloodshotrecords.com

L-R: Sara Romweber, Dex Romweber & Jack White



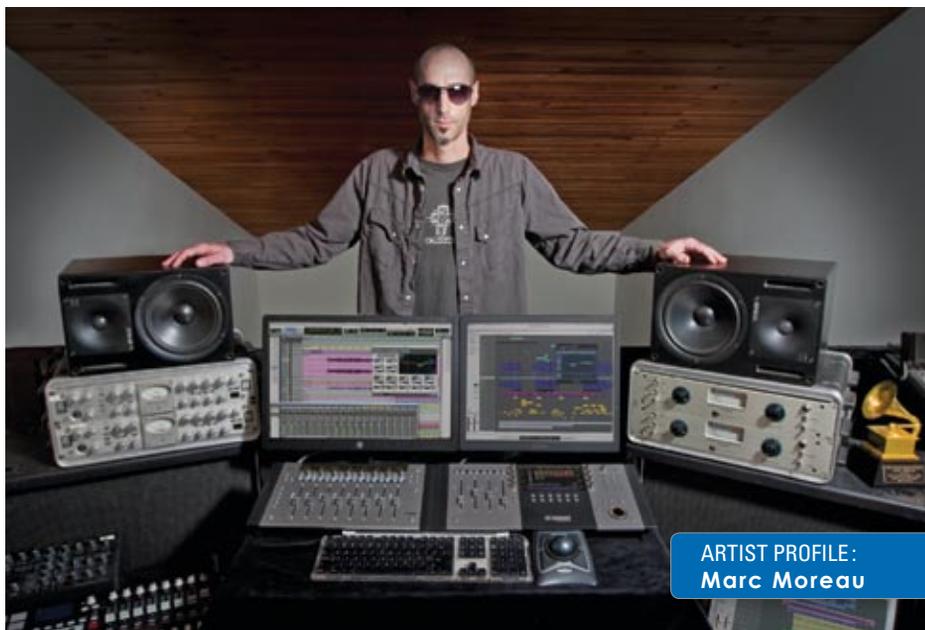
Jo McCauley

White: There was one piece of equipment that I really wanted. It was a neat mixing board, and I got one that came out of a South African television studio. I had it completely refurbished and that became the genesis of a lot of ideas that the studio would produce.

MC: You're really into old school recording techniques, but were there any places where new technology fit into making this new record?

White: I think *Pro Tools* is highly inappropriate to record music. I think it should be used in films or on documentaries. I think for recording music and wanting it to be soulful it's just the biggest mistake you can make. It's too easy to correct mistakes. It's too easy to "fix things." Engineers love it because it makes their job easier, but I don't think it's great for songwriting or performing. All it ends up doing is if you hit a wrong note you want to go back and repair it. And then you've repaired it in this completely fake way. And that comes out to the listener, I think. We hear this sort of clean, plastic perfection that's been applied to all the tracks. That is not the kind of music we grew up loving and listening to and wanting to be a part of. It becomes regimented and exactly, perfectly in time and perfectly in tune, and that just doesn't exist in the real world.

MC: The last time *Music Connection* checked in with you for a cover story [almost eight years ago], you were handling the lion's share of the day-to-day business of being in the White Stripes. How drastically have things changed for you from a business perspective?



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Artist Series

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White: We do have a manager, and lawyers, and a business manager, but I think it's the same thing as when I used to send out posters and press kits for the White Stripes when we went out on tour. I'm doing that now, just in a more amplified situation as the head of Third Man Records. Instead of hoping that we would be able to afford to make a record or hoping that we could trick somebody into putting it out, now I'm putting it out myself. And I'm recording in a studio just like I would record the White Stripes in my living room.

MC: The perception is that Jack White can do whatever he wants. But have you ever been unable to realize any projects due to industry realities or interference?

White: [Laughs] The only thing that's in my way ever is time. I talked to Alison about doing a split single with the White Stripes *five* years ago and it's taken that long for us to work together. It ended up not being that split single; it ended up being a whole new band. There are just not enough hours in the day, and that can get on my nerves at times because I hate sitting around and having to wait for something to happen. I like to just make it happen immediately.

MC: Your uncanny ability to work within a corporate system but not be of it is striking. How do you manage to take what you need from the system but also just kind of do your own thing?

White: Well, you have to be very fortunate and lucky just off the bat to be able to get away with *anything* like that. I think I might have been half smart half stupid early on when the White Stripes were getting courted by all the record labels and when I designed Third Man Records back then as a protective. I was saying no to everybody, "I don't want to sign with you. I don't want it unless we have it exactly the way we want." And looking back it was almost ridiculous. I could have smacked myself in the face for the things I turned down back then out of integrity. [Laughs]

But I'm very happy that I did that because it sprouted a whole way of doing things for the last decade, which I now see in the blossoms of Third Man Records. I don't know how to tell anybody else how you're supposed to go about getting in that position. I really have no idea. I think it's about wanting to get your hands dirty and work really hard because if you are hands-on and you work, no matter what you're doing, eventually it's going to blossom into something.

MC: How do you know when to take on a mainstream project like the Coke jingle or the James Bond song and when to pass? Do you have a line in your own mind you won't cross?

White: I do, and I think it doesn't really correlate with people who are listeners of what I do or fans of what I do. And the lines are so blurred now. We have a certain section of people who would say, "Such and such [artist] is a sell-out for doing that," but at the same time those are the same people who won't buy your records; they're just taking them from their friends' computers. But they're also telling you, "I'm not gonna give you money, but you also cannot make money that way in a different fashion." I know in my heart I've never gone against my own feelings about music and art.

I've only done exactly what spoke to me. But there are offers that come in daily that are *really* tough to turn down. Sometimes you say no and you just kick yourself and you're wondering who you're doing all this for, and why you're doing

all this, and what does it all matter anyway if I just did this 10 second thing? It would help pay for 15 other records I could make. Some people haven't understood the coke single I did. I almost wish I could just give them a laundry list of the things I've turned down. Just give me some credit! [Laughs]

MC: You take a lot of creative chances. Many more than most artists in your position do. Where does this fearlessness come from? Do you ever have doubts about your choices?

White: Thanks for saying that, first of all. I only have doubts when I'm done with the recording. I always feel great about making it and working on it and then mixing the song. But when it's time to release it to the lions I sort of feel like, "Oh man. Here we go again. What's going to be misinterpreted? What's going to be misunderstood about what this was all about?" Well, there's nothing you can do about it now. It's already completed. It has to come out.

MC: Any regrets about things you've done creatively?

White: Not really. I've never released anything that I wasn't proud of. I've never had to do it, and I'm really, really thankful that I haven't.

MC: Do you have any major dreams that are still unfulfilled?

White: I would really love to make films. That's 15 years of wanting to be involved in that and not really doing it, as a director, and that would be great. Also, to score films as well. I have been offered some things and haven't had the time to do them. I hope that opens up.

MC: What advice would you give to other artists?

White: I think they should just buck against exactly what's happening right now and buck against technology. That's the first thing that people should do. Get away from *Pro Tools*. Get away from sounding like everybody else. Get away from trying to find the right mathematical equation that will get your song on the radio. If the songs aren't pure to begin with and they can't make it by being recorded on a 4-track, then they shouldn't be there in the first place. And it's gonna end up being the same plastic, churned out, assembly line kind of music.

Contact Jessica Massa, jessica@pressherepublicity.com

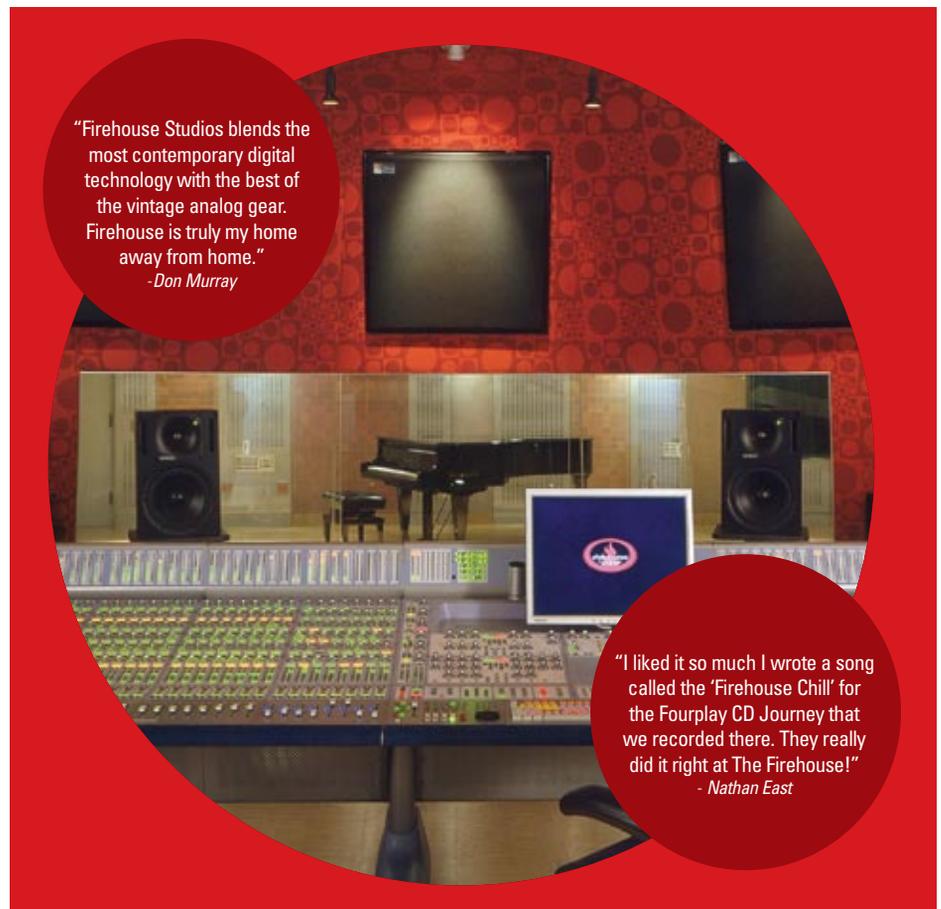


QUICK FACTS

about

Jack White

- Though known primarily as a guitar player, Jack White actually started out as a drummer and played drums in Goober & the Peas while still a teenager.
- Country music legend George Jones is on White's wish list of artists he would like to collaborate with in the future.
- White hopes to start working on a solo album at the end of 2009.
- He recently told *Self-Titled Magazine* that there is going to be a White Stripes film released during 2009.
- The Dead Weather will start touring in June and probably continue into the fall.



"Firehouse Studios blends the most contemporary digital technology with the best of the vintage analog gear. Firehouse is truly my home away from home."
- Don Murray

"I liked it so much I wrote a song called the 'Firehouse Chill' for the Fourplay CD Journey that we recorded there. They really did it right at The Firehouse!"
- Nathan East

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