



COURTESY OF BEACH HOUSE / SUB POP RECORDS

Livin' the Dream

For a band that makes such heavenly music, Beach House is incredibly down to earth.

By John Lewis

Walking through Beach House's Fells Point rehearsal space is like visiting an island of misfit musical toys. Dozens of keyboards and amps, with cables snaking between them, line the floor, and some equipment hugs the walls to create paths through it all. Band members Victoria Legrand and Alex Scally navigate the jumble with familiarity and delight, pointing out particular instruments, telling what recordings they're on, and noting the provenance—most often a local thrift shop—of each piece.

They are soft-spoken and unassuming, casually outfitted (she in denim, he in work clothes and boots), and obviously energized by their surroundings. Scally presses an organ pedal with his foot, activating a rumbling bass tone that fills the spacious room. "You can *feel* that," he says, before turning his attention to an upright piano. "We got this piano four years ago off Craigslist and used it on our last two records"—2010's *Teen Dream* and the just released *Bloom*—"because it sounds honky-tonk *and* classical."

"It's the best-sounding piano," says Legrand, who had one just like it as a youngster in Cecil County. Scally is a native Baltimorean. Introduced by friends in 2004, they began playing music together almost immediately—her earthy vocals perfectly complemented his ambient guitar playing—and have forged a collaborative (and platonic) relationship ever since.

Legrand points out a Marshall amp left behind by another band and a Montgomery Ward Airline organ that Scally bought at an Eastern Avenue Goodwill store for 20 bucks. Scally positions himself in front of yet another keyboard and plays the opening arpeggio from *Bloom's* "Lazuli."

"Everything in here has been used and loved," he says, smiling. "These things may not be precious or priceless to the rest of the world, but they are to us."

"This is our little kingdom," says Legrand. "It's a kingdom of crap, but it's our kingdom."

It's also ground zero for all things Beach House—the band writes songs, records demos, rehearses, and even constructs stage props in this warehouse space, which Legrand and Scally claim is their "favorite place in the world." They take seats on a sofa tucked inside a fur-lined alcove they constructed when *Pitchfork*, the influential music website, came here for a video shoot after *Teen Dream's* release.

That disc established the band as critics' darlings ("the dream pop duo to beat"—*Rolling Stone*; "swoon-inducing melodies"—*Time*), a commercial force (it sold nearly 140,000 copies, including 21,000 on vinyl), and a fixture on the concert circuit (including high-profile festivals like Coachella and Glastonbury). It also ensured that its follow-up would be one of the most hotly anticipated releases of 2012.

But Legrand and Scally seem unfazed. Later tonight, they'll rehearse with drummer Daniel Franz and continue fine-tuning material for a spring/summer tour that takes them across the U.S. and Europe and includes appearances on *Late Show with David Letterman* and *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon*, a concert in Central Park, and festival dates in Portugal and Spain. An industrial-looking, black-and-white stage set is crated and ready to go.

It, too, was designed and constructed by Legrand and Scally, who maintain a work schedule that would make a steelworker blush. "We control every aspect of our ca-

reers," says Legrand, "so we're always doing something that keeps us excited and feeling connected to what we do. It's incredibly satisfying to see our little ideas become reality."

"Throughout the process, we're always trying to hold on desperately to that tiny thing we had at the beginning," adds Scally. "Once we know we have something we love, we shelter it, hide it, prepare it, and keep it secret for as long as possible."

But most everything that's created in this room eventually gets shared with the world and, like the band, all the pieces travel from Fells Point to hotspots like Chicago, Los Angeles, Barcelona, Paris, and London. When asked if they're ever tempted to leave Baltimore and set up shop somewhere else, Legrand and Scally look perplexed.

"What city would you go to from Baltimore?" ask Scally, in a tone suggesting the question is strictly rhetorical.

"We haven't fallen in love with any other cities," adds Legrand.

"It's never a downgrade coming back to Baltimore," says Scally. "In fact, one of the best feelings is going directly from New York to Baltimore. If you've been in New York for four or five days, and you drive straight to Baltimore, it's like, 'Ahhhh,' when you get here. You go into a bar and there are only four people there, but they're all your friends. You order a drink that costs \$3, and there isn't some horrible jerk serving it to you. It's beautiful."

A devotion to such small but transcendent moments at the expense of bombast and celebrity infuses the band's work and brings to mind lines from *Bloom's* penultimate song "On the Sea." Over Scally's shimmering guitar, Legrand sings, "Whisper to a friend/Gentle to the end." It could be Beach House's guiding principle. **E**