

R5

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WHEN THEY WERE YOUNGER, R5 used to charge their family a dollar to watch them play in their basement. Tonight, they're scheduled to play a sold out show at the Best Buy Theater in New York City.

Inside a hot pink-painted dressing room two stories below a long queue of fans, the members of R5 are posing in front of a blinding, white strobe light. Rydel Lynch (keyboard), Riker Lynch (bass), Ross Lynch (rhythm guitar), Rocky Lynch (lead guitar) and Ellington Ratliff (drums) stand beside one another, shifting between smiles and serious faces. R5 have definitely done this before, but what sets them apart is their blatantly natural chemistry.

The first time I met R5 in December of 2012 they were dressed in coordinated, black-and-white, studded ensembles. Today, I can't make a valid comparison between any two outfits. Rydel is dressed in a short, lacy white dress and combat boots. The men of the band are dressed more casually — simple T-shirts or baseball tees and jeans. R5 are no longer dressed to match. This time around, they're individuals. Because the truth is, R5 are older and they're done with gimmicks. They're ready to take steps forward and hope their fans will follow closely behind.

I sit on the dressing room floor with Ross sitting cross-legged beside me. Rydel, Riker, Rocky and Ratliff all manage to squeeze onto a black leather couch. It's been eight months since I last spoke to R5, just a day after their first Good Morning America appearance. They made their second one just a few hours prior to our meeting today. When I ask them to recap their adventures from the past few months, Rocky looks at me with a blank expression in his eyes. "Oh crap," he says. Clearly a lot has happened in those 200-something

days.

The Colorado-born band had simple beginnings. R5 began performing for small crowds at festivals and often sifted through Craigslist advertisements looking for venues and events that needed performers. "We would play absolutely any show we could get," Riker said to me two years ago. It was crucial for R5 to get their hands on any kind of exposure. Lately, they haven't needed to look for gigs on Craigslist.

R5 have spent the last eight months traveling the globe in planes, trains and assorted vehicles while on their Louder World Tour. After a recent six weeks in Europe, and three weeks in Canada, the band is currently wrapping up their final performances in North America before heading back to Europe. R5 showed up to soundcheck a little late this afternoon, but it's excusable — they were napping after their 3 a.m. wake up call for GMA. "I didn't even know we were late for soundcheck," Ratliff mutters quietly to himself before his bandmates chuckle beside him. Despite their global endeavors I smile at the one thing that hasn't been tampered with—their lovable quirkiness.

Since their freshman full-length *Louder* was released in September of last year, the record climbed to No. 2 on the iTunes charts and hit No. 1 in 10 different countries. Their success doesn't stop there either. They recently filmed a Ring Pop commercial that will air nationally, and then they will be heading out on yet another tour this fall. But that's not a big deal. The five international jet-setters have seen more of the world than most people will see in a lifetime.

While traveling the roads of Jerusalem, Stockholm, Milan and Copenhagen, R5 have grown accustomed to the tour bus lifestyle by

now. "That's actually how we're getting to Europe," Ratliff jokes. "The bus turns into a submarine." Rocky immediately turns to him and says, "Wait, but how sick would that be?"

R5 love traveling to places they have yet to leave their mark on, but their effervescent international fan base encourages them to keep coming back. On their first European run on the Louder tour, the band found themselves competing with the intensity of their energetic crowds. "This time around, we were kind of like, 'Whoa.'" Riker says of their worldwide audiences. "They made us want to set a new level for our performances." And that's another important fact about R5: They continually want to raise that bar.

"We had a lot of fun making *Louder* and had even more fun touring with it," Ratliff says. R5 agree that *Louder* was a strong first record and serves as steady foundation for their upcoming creations. In fact, they're already planning for their sophomore full-length, which is slated for a fall release. "I don't think any band should stay the same for their entire career," Ross says. "There needs to be some sort of evolution otherwise your fans might outgrow you."

R5's process to writing music comes naturally. The band's fun and outgoing personality inspire most of their music. Their favorite musicians help contribute to their sound too. They are, however, growing older, and plan to develop their music accordingly. "Our newer material is a step in a different direction," Riker says. Most recently R5 have begun experimenting with heavy percussion and sounds — specifically a firework sample that Riker begins to gleam about. With all the positive feedback they received from *Louder*, it only makes sense for fans to prepare themselves for the band's









next big step.

The members of R5 all fall between the ages of 18 and 22, and they agree that this change is coming with maturity. Their new record promises to showcase their evolution, all while staying true to the original tunes that hooked many of their listeners. "Most of our fans are our age, so they're maturing and growing with us," Rydel says. "It'll be good," Rocky interjects. "It's a new, fresh take on R5."

R5 have an overall idea of where they'd like to be, including making a shift from their current mainstream, "bubble gum-esque" sound.

A vast majority of their fan base comes from Ross' success on Disney Channel's *Austin & Ally*. His well-known television persona has only empowered the band's publicity, but ultimately the band's true talent is what's keeping fans interested. The typical Disney-endorsed acts are anticipated to be cleaner and appropriate for all ages. R5, on the other hand, are trying to steer away from being too squeaky clean.

"I think the newer stuff is a lot less bubblegum-sounding than *Louder*," Rocky says. His older brother, Riker agrees. "If you listen to that album, we say all sorts of innuendos in that," Riker says. "But what makes it easy listening are the melodies." With that said, they hope the new EP and follow-up album won't be a total surprise to their fans. They're pushing to make this evolution evident in their lyrics and instrumentals, just as it's evident in their age. "We're still R5, but a whole year later in our lives," Riker says. R5 are constantly making a name for themselves, but they wouldn't categorize themselves under any genre. "If we were to label ourselves, we would just set limitations," Ross says. "I want to keep all possibilities open and see where we go naturally."

But regardless of sound, R5



claim their true element shines on stage. “We always say that we don’t feel like you can understand R5 until you see us live,” Riker says. “You just get it after that.” They don’t have the pyrotechnics or background dancers they’ve been yearning for, but they apparently have “their own lights” and “really cool fog.” I would not know. I have yet to see R5 perform live. The dressing room explodes with an abrupt series of “What?” and “Why not?” though the best response comes from Rocky who furrows his eyebrows and asks, “Why do you even like us, then?”

My absence at tonight’s show wasn’t my choice; there was a lack of complimentary tickets. “Ross was inviting everyone over at MTV earlier,” Riker says. Ross lets out a laugh. “That’s what I hate about Los Angeles and New York City,” Ross continues. “You can never have enough tickets, and I just want to invite everyone.” Tonight’s guest list is filled with 200 names. Hearing this puts a smile on my face. They did, after all, start by asking for their family’s money. “That just means we have to start playing bigger venues,” Ratliff interjects. They

toss around the thought of one day performing at Radio City Music Hall or Madison Square Garden before Rocky catches my attention.

“Can I ask you a question?” he asks, before leaning in closer to me. When I agree, he follows up with another inquiry. “Are you a Rangers fan?” He pumps his fist into the air when I tell him no. “So you’re okay with them losing the Stanley Cup?” The Los Angeles residents obviously take their competition seriously — to the point where they considered posting a Vine of Rocky walking through Times Square to promote the L.A. Kings hockey team. They start laughing when I tell them Ranger fans might’ve started a riot. That playful demeanor is what attracted the listeners currently waiting in line outside. And even with such a loyal fan base, R5 manages to keep cool while basking in the spotlight. “Someone once told us that fame doesn’t change who you are, it brings out the real you,” Ross says. “When people start catering to you, it’s up to you to decide how to react. We are also surrounded by people that wouldn’t put up with it.”

R5’s tour manager walks into

the dressing room. Their meet and greet is starting in 10 minutes. The band, who lost track of time, begins to file out of the room after giving me hugs. But first, Riker calls for his tour manager’s attention. “We’re getting her into the show tonight,” he says, resting his arm on my shoulder. “Can we get her a ticket?”

Luckily, Riker makes it happen.

Later that night, I watch R5 take the dimly lit stage. I stand in a back corner of the theater, in the middle of the madness. Teenage girls are running across the venue, holding a large photo of Ross’ face adorned with Christmas lights, but they stop once they realize what’s about to happen. Their crowd erupts with shrieks and screams as their silhouettes take position on stage.

Like Riker said, you tend to just “get” R5 once you see them live. Between their easy listening tunes, playful personalities and the fan base that drives their constant craving to raise the bar, I think I do. I can only imagine where they’ll be in another eight months. I bet they’ll still shoot for pyrotechnics and background dancers, and I’m sure they’ll have them soon enough.^{NO}

