

SXSW 2017: Ocean Park Standoff x Vinyl Mag

By Lexi Kelson | March 15, 2017

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A DJ, a producer and a classically trained vocalist walk into a studio. The names behind those titles? Samantha Ronson, Pete Nappi and Ethan Thompson. On paper, their three backgrounds may not sound like the most intuitive match, but take a listen to their music and you'll be convinced otherwise. **Ocean Park Standoff** is the alt-pop trio heading from LA to Austin to impress and engage fans at all four of their SXSW shows.

On March 3 of this year, the band released their debut self-titled EP on Hollywood Records. To say that the EP was well-received would be an understatement, considering the fact that the band has since been added to Spotify's New Music Friday playlist, named Elvis Duran's Artist of the Month and performed the song "Good News" on the TODAY show.

I had the privilege of chatting with not just one or two but *all three* of the band members. It's pretty fitting since their writing process never fails to include each of their unique voices giving their songs that extra something special. Each one of the EP's tracks are well-written, both musically and lyrically, but still sing-along-able. I, for one, have had "Good News" stuck in my head for the past 24 hours, and I am *not* complaining.

Check out what the three artists had to say about their summer tour and band name, and take a guess at who prefers tacos over barbecue. And of course, don't forget to check them out at SXSW with us this week!



Vinyl Mag: How did you three start playing together?

Ethan Thompson: We started playing together because Samantha and Pete had a session they got into together through their publishers and managers, and they hit it off right away. After they did a couple of sessions together, Pete brought me in because Pete and I had been working together as well. We wrote two songs together, and after the first two songs we were having such a good time that, I think Samantha was the first one to suggest that, "let's make a project and put a bunch of songs together that we like and songs just for us." And that's kind of how the band started forming, really within the first 48 hours of knowing each other.

VM: How do you combine your different backgrounds into one sound?

Samantha Ronson: We're all kind of in the room while we're writing and playing, so I guess we all just kind of throw all of our ideas mainly at Pete, and then he makes them sound good.

VM: What's your favorite way to experiment and create a new song together?

Ethan: I feel like one of my favorite things is that there's always one of us that's excited about the start of a song. Usually it's not all of us at once—there's someone that comes in with a base idea whether it's Pete with a track, Samantha with a lyric or a melody or a chord, and me with a lyric or melody or chord. So it's always someone's excitement that kind of stirs it up, or it's something that we're going through in life that stirs up the songwriting.

VM: Do you tend to start more with a melody or lyrics first, or does it just depend?

Samantha: It totally, totally depends from song to song.

Pete Nappi: It's always different.

Ethan: Yeah, it makes it entertaining for us, because we never really know what's going on. We just do it 'til it feels good. If it feels good at the end of the day, then we'll continue working on that song.

Pete: We basically just press a bunch of buttons all day and see what happens.

VM: What was your favorite part about making your EP?

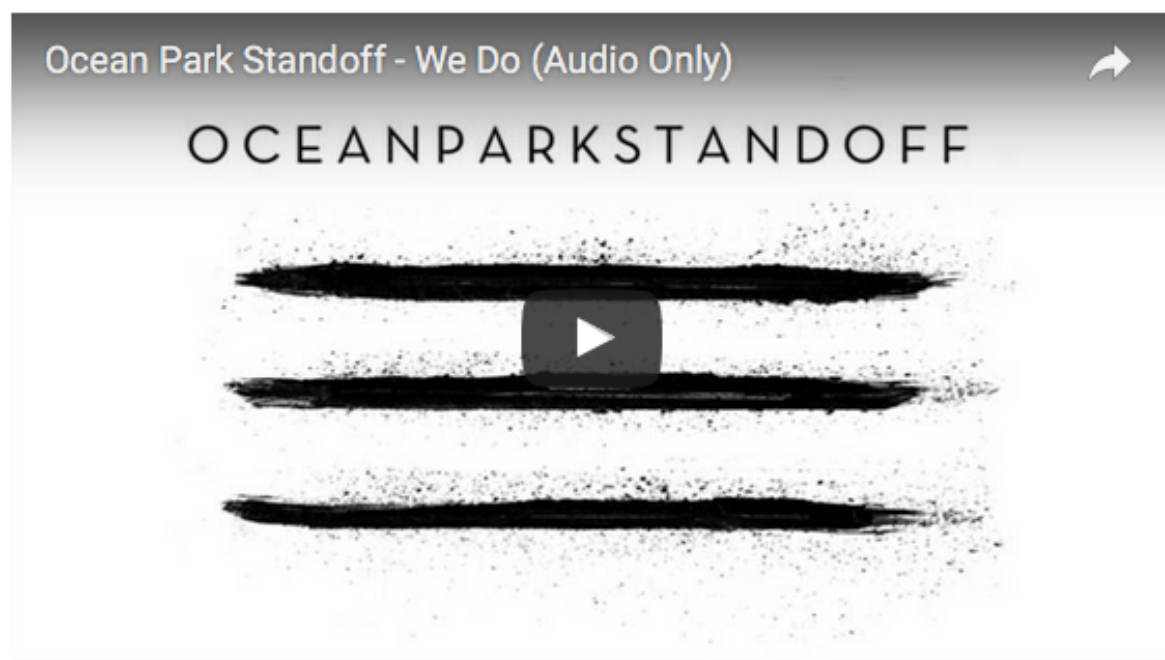
Samantha: It's all pretty fun! And that's kind of why we're doing it. I don't think we'd be doing it if it wasn't.

Ethan: I feel like one of our favorite parts is definitely that we've all done our own solo projects—Pete's done his production, Samantha's done her DJing—coming together and doing this as a group is the funnest part of the whole thing. Because waking up for radio things at seven in the morning or doing a show and packing out at like 1 a.m. is so much fun, because it's the three of us there plus a couple others. But it's the three of us together celebrating the victories and dealing with the losses the whole time, and that's the best part—it's the three of us together.

VM: On the flip side, what was the most challenging part of making the EP?

Samantha: I think it's taking that risk of putting aside all the other things that we're doing on our own and just having faith and diving into this and putting everything into this and hoping for the best.

Pete: To add to that, I think especially for me with all the production while we're making it, it's important to know when to just stop, because I could just keep going and adding things. I think a big part of it is to know when to stop or when to take away things to make it simpler. You get so into these songs, and you've been working on them for so long that eventually you just don't know anymore. So, that's kind of been the hard part for me, but it's always worked out. Luckily, I have Ethan and Samantha to tell me when to chill the hell out.



VM: Do you have favorite songs on the EP?

Ethan: I think it's always rotating, and every show it switches up—it just kind of depends on the night. But I think one of my favorites right now is "We Do" because it's the song that I think kind of brought us together as a live band first, so that's one of my favorites.

Samantha: My favorite is "Lost Boys"—it's the first one we wrote together, so it's always kind of been special to me in that way.

Pete: Whenever I listen to the EP, I'll listen to "Lost Boys," the first song, and I'll be like, "yeah, this is sick." And then I listen to "We Do" and I'm like, "wait, is this my favorite?" And I just do that with the whole EP!

VM: What makes your songs stand out from other artists in your genre?

Ethan: I'd say one of the things that makes it stand out is that we all come from three different backgrounds, and one of us isn't overriding the others when we're creating. We're always doing our best to get the three of us into each song, which I think is what makes it unique because it's not just one head leading it—it's three heads leading it at all times. It's one of our biggest challenges, and we get into our little battles, but at the end it's just so much better when the three of us are all involved in it.

VM: So, what's the story behind your band name?

Ethan: Pete and I were on our way to a session—we would always traverse like an hour to get to Samantha's pretty much every week. This was when we were just deciding that we were going to make a project, and we'd just decided we wanted to be a band. But we were on our way over to Samantha's, and we were going to be an hour late because all the streets were blocked off, and we couldn't get to her house. After there were helicopters flying over her backyard, Samantha got online and figured out that there was a standoff going on at Ocean Park and Tenth.

Samantha: Yeah, there was a standoff with cops and a guy with a shotgun. And I was like, "That's our band name—Ocean Park Standoff!" Of course, that's where my brain goes when I hear about a standoff.

Ethan: It was cool the way the name came together, because I feel like it's kind of how the project came together. We're all very paranoid as artists—I wouldn't say uptight but very paranoid people. And when we're together, we're taking things seriously and working hard, but I feel like we relax a little bit and everything seems to kind of fall to us with hard work. But, the way that the name came, how it naturally just came up is exactly how everything came together. It's just kind of naturally evolved without us simply trying to force it to be something.

Samantha: I think it's more that we overthink things than are paranoid.

Ethan: Speak for yourself—I'm paranoid!

Samantha: *(Laughs)* I just overthink things way too much.

Ethan: We're able to relax each other a little bit, and we're just having a great time.

VM: **I heard you're touring with Third Eye Blind this summer. What part of that experience are you most excited about?**

Ethan: Just to hang out, honestly! We just went on a tour together in a van, and there was really no problem at all. We all got along. By the end of it, we got off the road and the next show we had in LA, we were all like, "we missed you," and it'd been under 24 hours. So I'm just excited to hang out all summer—it's going to be fun!

Samantha: Same!

VM: **Do you have a favorite venue you've played?**

Ethan: The Peppermint Club was pretty sick when we played in LA, and I think one of our other favorites was the show in New York at the Mercury Lounge.

Samantha: My favorite venue was the place in Troy, New York.

Ethan: Oh yeah, The Hangar in New York! That was a cool spot.

Pete: We're going to play the Jones Beach Amphitheater this summer, and I've literally been talking about playing there since the day we started the band.

Ethan: Yeah, and then we got on the summer tour—which is incredible—and on the lineup it said Jones Beach. And it's the night of Pete's birthday!

VM: **What shows are you playing for South by?**

Samantha: We're playing at Universal Party, Pandora, 7th Annual West of the Best, and the Grammy Museum Homegrown LA showcase.

VM: **Are there any artists you're looking forward to seeing perform?**

Ethan: Friends! I'm stoked to see Hayley Kiyoko's set—she's a friend of Pete and ours, and also LOLO who we just got off tour with. It'll be fun to hang out with them again in a different spot.

Pete: One of mine is this DJ/producer who's super young—his name is Sam Gellaitry. He's awesome.

Samantha: I just want to eat a lot of barbecue!

VM: Well, that's perfect because we always ask if you prefer barbecue or tacos! I'm going to guess your answer would be barbecue, Samantha!

Samantha: *(Laughs)* Yes, it is! I just like all food.

VM: What about you two—barbecue or tacos?

Pete: Barbecue.

Ethan: I'd have to say probably tacos, because anything I can eat with my hands, I'm so down.

Pete: You can eat barbecue with your hands.

Ethan: Yeah, if I can eat barbecue with my hands as long as no one's watching, then it's my favorite. But I just like eating food with my hands—it's pretty much my go-to. A burrito is my all-time meal no matter what.

Pete: It's your primal instincts.

Ethan: Exactly, I've got to remind myself of my roots.