

JACKSON WATERS

Brian Meek
BASS

David Leonard
LEAD VOCALS

Jesse LaFave
GUITAR

Ryan Hawk
DRUMMER

Toby Friesen
GUITAR

The music scene has long been cluttered by groups of ambitious twenty-somethings with vintage Fenders and hooky melodies, and it's a rare triumph for a band to emerge from the rubble of college-rock with brilliance, intelligence and promise.

But Jackson Waters cannot be compared with any current or preceding band; even words like "bright," "significant" and "essential" don't begin to scratch the surface of their refreshing, distinct and somehow so-familiar sound. With a decidedly pop/rock core that is perfectly peppered with incredible ballad moments, it's hard to imagine that the lyrics could also hold their own weight and pass every intellectual lyrical test with flying colors, and yet, they do. So how do you technically classify Jackson Waters? The members of the band simply call it "life rock."

Most of the group members can trace their roots to prestigious John Brown University in Siloam Springs, Arkansas. Drummer Ryan Hawk's first taste of performing came during his stint in a punk band. "We played really, really loud and it was terrible," he recalls with a wince and a mischievous smile. "Then I decided to be a singer for an emo band and that was even worse."

Ryan's experience eventually gave way to a desire to find a lead vocalist with a more melodic flavor. He soon stumbled upon singer/songwriter David Leonard, another John Brown student who had been leading worship and playing in a local band. Ryan recalls, "I saw David play a show and his style was really inviting...and his voice was amazing."

From there, talk of playing together turned to reality as they booked their very first show at a coffee shop in Tulsa. "It's funny because we showed up and played acoustic country rock to a mostly goth crowd. The best part was that they loved it," Ryan says.

Along the way, David and Ryan recruited fellow John Brown student Toby Friesen to play guitar. Born and raised in Kobe, Japan where his parents were missionaries, Toby moved to Kansas when he was 13. "I think we all remember saying that we have the dream of playing music when we were kids," Toby relates.

From dream to reality, the band began taking shape and added bassist Brian Meek and guitarist Jesse LaFave. Soon thereafter, they established themselves as Jackson Waters, a self-crafted moniker that perfectly fit their Southern-inspired modern rock sound. They recorded an independent CD that garnered airplay on local stations, which quickly led to opening slots for acts such as Big Daddy Weave, BarlowGirl, Thousand Foot Krutch and Bebo Norman.

Between their appealing sound and down-to-earth, accessible personalities, Jackson Waters easily gained a large following. Toby says, "We just love hanging around after each show and talking with everyone. We feel like that is our ministry—being real with the people who come out to see us." Ryan adds that their musical diversity creates an audience that ranges everywhere from thirteen-year-old junior-high students to fifty-year-old parents. With collective influences ranging from Keith Green and Steven Curtis

Chapman to the Black Crowes and Boyz II Men, Ryan says, “It’s sort of like how both kids and parents alike are crazy about the Beatles...people of all ages can identify with our music.”

To meld those diverse influences into a sound all their own, the band began working with Rob Hawkins, an up-and-coming producer who had worked with David Crowder on his *Sunsets and Sushi* album. As a friend of Word Records A&R guru Otto Price, Hawkins began sharing the Jackson Waters project. Price’s enthusiasm for the band’s fresh sound soon led to a deal with Word Records. On transitioning from a local college band to a major label act, Jesse says, “It’s been a pretty wild ride for about a year. My whole family played music while I was growing up in Oklahoma, but I still never thought I’d be here.”

What has taken the band from regional favorites to the national spotlight is the strength of the music. They’ve drawn comparisons to Maroon 5, but any comparison falls short of capturing the unique flavor of the band. The melodies are soaring and have a cinematic quality. The lyrics are thoughtful and explore the complexities of life through the filter of faith.

The band’s debut album, *Come Undone* truly showcases the band’s diverse and infectious style. The first single, “Give Me Amazing Grace,” is a powerful anthem that talks about the beauty of experiencing God’s grace. Brian lists “Give It Away” and “Center of Attention” as his favorite songs on the album because of the unique way they are put together musically. “Let It Fly” is another favorite that Toby says is, “Powerful. It speaks to what we’re doing right now—venturing out there.”

Another particular track, “Jamie’s Song,” is a relevant, hope-filled ballad that is sure to connect with listeners. David says that “Come Undone” is his favorite, though. “The song is just about the skeletons in our closets. We all have a past and things we’ve done wrong, but we have a Father that loves us despite our imperfections. I think that’s the beauty of Christianity.” Each listen through takes the audience deeper into the lyrics and message, but essentially, only one listen through is necessary for *Come Undone* to become a CD collection staple.

Jackson Waters’ “life rock” is really just that: music that is there for you, no matter what you’re going through. Front man David says of their self-proclaimed genre, “Every song that comes out is about us or life; what we are going through or what our friends are going through. It’s music that meets you exactly where you’re at.”

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