

At the top of their game

Sitting in a quaint pub on a rainy Saturday evening, Newcastle band Athletes in Paris ponder over the ways in which they could put an exciting spin on our interview. "Send us on an all expenses paid night out, with a hired limo to pick us up," jokes percussionist, Mooch. "You could call it 'A Weekend with Athletes in Paris' and write about the experience."

You can only imagine what the experience of a weekend with Matt, Mooch, Ross, Joakim and Chris would involve, but if my 90 minutes with them in a village pub is anything to go by, it's bound to be a memorable one.

Their personalities are akin to their music and performances, catchy, energetic and infectious. They are, by most standards, an indie-rock band, but the inclusion of two drummers playing differing styles and with singer Matt's laid-back, broad-accented vocals, Athletes in Paris have produced a unique, upbeat, poppy sound (with world beats and salsa grooves, according to their press release).

"A lot of it comes from us listening to the charts, like Katy Perry and Dizzie Rascal," explains Matt. "That punchy pop sound, but with guitars and whatnot, done in our own way and style. And I don't care how that comes across, if it sounds good, it sounds good."

"When the songs are written we all

They might be more pubs and clubs than track and field but Athletes in Paris are definite contenders, as **Ian McCabe** discovers.

play off-of each other and, so we all inspire one another," adds Mooch. "We all like music which makes you move, groove-orientated music."

"It's all about enjoyment at the end of the day," says Matt. "When Mooch and I had our old band, the sound was quite downbeat and quite indulgent. Something was missing. Now, I feel this is where it's at, upbeat, fast, and full of energy. It's more us."

Their energy has seen them gain a cult following around the North East and has also garnered them praise from the likes of BBC Radio 6's Tom Robinson and The Futureheads' Barry Hyde, who called them 'A breath of fresh air in the blustery north.' They were even handpicked to support Jack Penate at Glasgow University in 2009.

It's been a rapid ascension for the band, a mixture of childhood friends and college classmates. However it has taken a number of years for them, in their current incarnation, to find their feet, playing around and experimenting with their sound. And they've had time to create an identity of their own, even if their name is stolen from Matt's dad's band in the 80s.

"The first year we spent together we were just messing about. But because of it, we know what we have to do now," explains Matt. "We found out a lot about the band and ourselves in that time, especially in terms of song writing."

"I've been doing this for four years and I've never been this comfortable with a group of lads before, ever. And that comes from just chipping away, and it's starting to realise itself a little bit. It's much freer because of it. This is who we are. We might be cheesy, but it's who we are."

They've since released two singles, Borrowed Time and Heartbeat, and their live performances show a band that are very much comfortable in their own skin and are here to have a good time. "I think it's because I don't put a whole lot of emphasis on the technical aspect of our gigs," explains Matt. "It's more about the buzz and the atmosphere. I get more pleasure from just being with the lads and the craic from the audience."

At face value, Athletes in Paris are a band in it for fun, but do they see themselves making a serious go of things?



"Absolutely," exclaims Matt. "It's what we're gunning for. Our manager in London has been telling us to be patient as far as making a career out of this. So we'll be taking our time, but we're definitely trying to make something of this."

So what does the future hold for Athletes in Paris? "The next thing we're going to be doing is release a single for free in November, called No Bridge," says Mooch. "It's a bit different from the others too, there's a bit of saxophone, so we're looking forward to releasing that. We've got quite a few songs recorded, so hopefully some time in 2012 we'll have an album and a tour. We'll see." If anything is guaranteed, it's that we'll be hearing a lot more of Athletes in Paris in the not so distant future.

● To find out more about Athletes in Paris, visit www.athletesinparis.com. You can catch them live, headlining Newcastle's Riverside on October 27 and 28 as part of the Oxjam show at The Cluny.

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