

BIG IMAGE

Meet Big Image: The Brummies who bring dance and house influences into a four-piece band set up. Gemma Cockrell chats to vocalist George Johnson about their recent EP, the 2022 festival season, performing at Villa Park and a text they may or may not have received from Beabadoobee's manager.



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Big Image's latest EP, *Human Touch Is Forever*, was written during and heavily inspired by lockdown. "We wrote all of the songs in lockdown, except for the song that the EP title came from - it just kind of correlated and fitted in." Even though this was a difficult time for many, it fuelled the band's creative process by opening up an extended period of time for them to solely focus on writing. "I was lucky enough to get furlough, so it was almost like being a signed band. We weren't working, so we were just writing all the time, when normally you're working, or you've got other things to do, so don't have time for it. In a way, it was the best creative time for us really!"

The band also underwent a big rebranding of their image during this time (see what I did there?), abandoning their previous name, Ivory Wave in favour of their current moniker. "We'd written all this new music and we'd been around for a bit, so we decided to start afresh. We had a member leave, and we felt like we had the chance to start again and do everything how we wanted to do it," George explains. "When you're a band and you're touring, sometimes you don't get the chance to stop and think about whether you really like everything that you're doing. Sometimes, it comes so fast that you don't have a chance to stop and think."

Big Image's fusion of electro-pop and dance music really makes them stand out among other bands, so it was no surprise to hear George admit that he doesn't really listen to any typical 'bands', opting for hip-hop and dance music instead. "When Luke and I started the band, we were obsessed with Jagwar Ma, an Australian band. We got the EP produced by Steve Osbourne, who is famous for doing dance music records. He's not really done a lot of bands. Sometimes, when you're in a studio, producers can be a bit old fashioned, but we like to change it all up, and record the drums in a weird way, and things like that!"

The band got the opportunity to record live versions of every EP track at Villa Park, which were published to their YouTube channel. An absolute dream for the Birmingham locals, you'd think? Well... "I'm actually a West Brom fan!" George confesses. "So, it was the worst team's grounds for me to go and play at! Nah, it's all banter. To play in a massive stadium, hearing your music bouncing around... the experience was amazing, and Villa are



amazing for letting us do that. The rest of the lads in the band are all Villa supporters as well, so it meant a lot to them."

When I call George via Zoom on a Monday morning, he immediately admits that he is extremely hungover, but he explains that it is for a very valid reason: the band had just got back home after performing at The Neighbourhood Festival in Manchester that weekend. "We just went out and didn't come back home!" he laughs. "It was the first time we'd played Manchester for three years. For a band that has a stereotypical Manchester sound, it's always like 'why aren't we playing here every week?' so it was amazing to be back."

George also declares that the Community Festival at Finsbury Park was a highlight of Big Image's 2022 festival season. "It was the best one for me. It was funny, we were first on in the day, so I didn't think anyone would watch us because I didn't think anyone would be getting to the festival until 6pm. We walked out on stage, and it couldn't have been busier! It was mental. We had the first mosh pit of the day. The whole line up was young - new, fresh artists rather than heritage acts. It was really inspiring."

Alongside a busy festival season, Big Image got the opportunity to support huge bands like DMAs, and Circa Waves this summer. "It's always good when you're doing what you're doing, and then a band who are

smashing it think you're really good and ask if you can come and support them. It gives you that confidence to think we're doing the right thing! We always say we love supporting people, because you walk into a room, and no one knows who you are. By the end of your set, you can win all the fans over. They aren't inclined to like you, but we love the fact that it's a bit of a competition."

Looking to the future, Big Image are eager to score more support slots. "There's a Blossoms tour coming up that would be a dream. Kasabian as well, we love them," George muses. Then, some more unexpected names are thrown into the picture: "We'd also love to support someone like The Prodigy, The Chemical Brothers or someone like that." He does explain his reasoning here: "We've always said we'd love to support a band where everyone would think 'why are they supporting them?'. Like if we supported Harry Styles, or someone totally random."

Big Image have also received backing from BBC Introducing, something that George says you "can't put a price on". "It's amazing, the support they give you. It used to be NME and stuff like that - you'd get in when you were tiny, they'd write about you and it would launch your career, but that's not really a thing anymore unless you pay. BBC is totally free, and they really care about your music. If you're tiny and you send them a song and they

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like it, they’ll send it to Jack Saunders or someone like that. To be honest, they’ve been the only people who’ve supported us since the beginning. There was no benefit for them to do that, they just liked our music. We can’t thank them enough.”

One of the topics that I was most excited to speak to George about was the fact that there is a mobile phone number on the band’s website that fans can contact, leaving me intrigued to hear the most memorable message they’ve ever received. “It’s pretty mad, because it’s anonymous, so you can send anything and get away with it! Someone messaged us once, claiming to be Beabadoobee’s manager, saying ‘can you give us a call?’ We thought it was a wind-up, so we didn’t reply! Afterwards, we looked into it, and I actually think it was Beabadoobee’s manager, but we just didn’t think it could be real! Probably should have replied to that...” he laughs.



So, what’s next for Big Image? “We’re recording a lot at the moment, putting a lot of music together with a guy who produced a lot of The Chemical Brothers’ stuff, which is amazing. Then, we’re going to tour until our legs fall off! Carry on until no one books

us anymore,” he laughs. When pressed about whether these touring plans will involve a trip to Nottingham at any point, George tells me that they’re actually in talks with some bands at the moment about playing Rock City. “We played there

back in 2019, before lockdown. It’s the best venue ever!” he exclaims — a comment that I’m sure many of our Nottingham-based readers will be inclined to agree with.

Words and design by Gemma Cockrell