



BANG GANG

Words by Bryan Borzykowski

Despite being a regular on Iceland's indie rock scene for the last 10 years, Bang Gang's Bardi Jóhannsson is barely known on this side of the Atlantic. So what's taken so long? "I got pissed off at the U.S.," he says from his home in Iceland.

Jóhannsson's dissatisfaction with America began three years ago when he was readying to release his second Bang Gang album, *Something Wrong*. His American label at the time, Emperor Norton, closed down, and a year of negotiating was all for naught. "I was like, 'Fuck America,'" he says in a thick accent.

It took a while, but Jóhannsson learned that fighting the U.S. market was bad for business. "I started thinking that it was stupid to be pissed off at the U.S. generally because of one label. It's like, if you have a bad girlfriend and you never want another girlfriend again. I'd be a monk!"

Still, Jóhannsson hasn't let go of his negative experience altogether. The only way he was going to release his music in the States was if he started his own label and maintained complete creative control. Now, armed with a Ryko distribution deal, *Something Wrong* has finally reached U.S. shores.

Bang Gang, which is just Jóhannsson and a few guest singers like Keren Ann, would have fit in well with Emperor Norton's roster. *Something Wrong* is a finely crafted collection of epic, atmospheric tunes with incredibly infectious, and repetitive, vocals.

Jóhannsson can't pinpoint where his grand sound comes from. "I used to listen to Public Enemy, Guns N' Roses, and death metal. Then I did a period of easy listening and classical music. I have no idea where my music's from—at some point I even liked Janet Jackson."

Jóhannsson's eclectic musical tastes show up on *Something Wrong* in the form of the Supremes' cover, "Stop! In the Name of Love." Surprisingly, Jóhannsson stays true to the original—it's not nearly as atmospheric as the rest of the record—but, because of its repetitive chorus and his clean, layered vocals, the song sounds like it belongs to Bang Gang.

While covering Diana Ross is a bit unusual, it's not as strange as Jóhannsson's band name. Bang Gang is a provocative moniker to say the least. While it might elicit chuckles from North American teens, he explains, "We speak Icelandic, it means nothing here." When he chose the name, he didn't expect to spark controversy. He picked it because he liked the book/film title *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* and wanted to play around with those words. He's been told it's a ridiculous name. "People had been advising me to find something new," he says. "But if you have a stupid name as a person, people don't tell you to change your name. So I say thanks but no thanks."

With a curious band name and a bunch of great tunes, Jóhannsson should finally get America's attention. And let's hope they do, because the success of his third release—hitting shelves five months after *Something Wrong*—is dependent on how many concertgoers he can attract. "It's more for stadiums," he says, half joking. "Definitely a stadium album."