

SUBSTANCE & SWAGGER

Sometimes opportunity knocks—but sometimes it pays to do the knocking yourself. That's the door-opening approach taken by Tommy Smith, guitarist and singer for rising London-based rock trio Leogun. The trio, which also includes bassist Matt Johnson and drummer Mike Lloyd, radiates crackling rock energy in the vein of Queens of the Stone Age and White Stripes. With the video for their first single, "Let's Be Friends," racking up views on YouTube, Leogun is now looking forward to the release of their debut LP in early 2013 on the Yamaha Entertainment Group label.

"We'd gathered a very loyal local following, but I wasn't speaking to anyone in the industry," Tommy says. "So I kind of cheekily tried my luck by going to my favorite bands' shows and trying to meet anyone I could who works with them."

One night at an Eagles of Death Metal show, one of Tommy's backstage conversations led to a meeting with Rocket Music, Elton John's management company—and now Leogun's as well. "I was trying my best not to be a pest, but still meet the right people," he says. "And obviously you need the right songs to back it up once you do present yourself!"

The band's musical attitude fills a void that Smith sees in present-day rock music. "I became aware at a very young age that there wasn't much male confidence or sexuality in music now," he says. "We always wanted to be as heavy as we could be, but still have that kind of sassy energy."

To capture this energy in the studio, Leogun took a classic approach, tracking bass and drums live to analog tape, then adding Tommy's guitars, vocals, and a handful of other elements. "There's a lot of energy, but also a huge dynamic range," he says. "There's a really beautiful acoustic song, just me and an acoustic guitar, and we put some string parts to it as well. My favorite albums have always had that range and color to them, so I'm super proud of it."





Onstage, it's all about the rock. "There's one rule, and that's to start with a huge amount of energy for the first four or five songs," says Tommy. "There's something beautiful about turning up your instruments and making as much noise as possible. I hope people will come away with the feeling that they've gone to see a proper band: three guys that are clearly great friends, but it's not dependent on the singer, or the drummer. It's the unit that counts."

Tommy's main guitar is a white Yamaha SGB1820 electric, which he plays in Leogun's initial video. "That guitar is very loud," he says. "It's the guitar to use when you want the biggest, widest tone you can possibly get. For the nature of our music and the sort of tone I was going for, this guitar was the obvious choice. And aesthetically, it does look beautiful!" He also records with a Yamaha LJ16 jumbo acoustic guitar. "It's got a great big wide neck, and a big, deep sound," Tommy says. "There's something about the depth of sound of that jumbo that sounded more like a grand piano than it did a six-string guitar."

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Tommy's bandmates also play Yamaha instruments: Matt has a BB2024X bass, and Mike uses a Maple Custom kit onstage and in the studio. "That bass has got a really aggressive tone," Tommy notes, "which is kind of cool because I have that fat tone with the SG. It's got a metal nut, which gives this spiky, razor-sharp top-end along with all the low-end that comes through. You get lots of definition and huge amounts of body. It's an aggressive-sounding beast."

And the Maple Custom kit? "It's massive-sounding," says Tommy. "It's a beautifully made, very strong, punchy drum kit. It all comes back down to the three-piece element: When there's only three of you, you can't really hide behind anyone. Everyone's got their own role, so the bigger-sounding you are, the better."

Leogun just finished their first US tour, but Tommy can't wait to get back on the road. "One unforgettable experience was playing on the KISS cruise and stirring up a little bit of buzz," he says. "We just played our hearts out, and people responded to that. We were summoned to [KISS manager] Doc McGhee's room and ended up drinking champagne with him until three o'clock in the morning. That felt very rock-and-roll. It was a huge privilege and something I won't forget!"