

One of the first things you'll notice if you attend a show by the Southern California quintet Something Corporate is the remarkable age range of the audience. No surprise that there are plenty of amped-up teens, given that frontman/chief songwriter Andrew McMahon is still one himself. But there are also older, more sedate fans savoring the group's offbeat love songs.

## SOMETHING CORPORATE'S **ANDREW McMAHON:** A Piano Man Goes Crunch!

ANOTHER UNUSUAL TRAIT FOR A YOUNG ROCK BAND: McMahon's instrument has not six strings, but 88. But don't expect an evening of introspective piano ballads. Something Corporate also boasts a pair of high-energy guitarists, and the group is signed to Drive-Thru Records, an indie label specializing in young punk bands.

"People who listen to radio songs tend to like our band, because we write choruses with hooks, so we'll always have a pop crowd," notes McMahon. "But because of our association with Drive-Thru, maybe kids who wouldn't normally listen to a band like us might give us a shot and hear something they like."

McMahon seems comfortable with the contrast. "I've always been a fan of a more driving sound, of blending guitar and piano chords. It took us quite some time to find a comfortable balance between the two, and we're still working on it. We have to be aware of how piano and guitar blend, of how their frequencies interact. Each part needs to be placed correctly within the arrangement so they can be both felt and heard."

Andrew feels there are definite advantages to writing at the piano rather than the guitar: "On piano, you have an easier roadmap to arrangement. It seems to be a better place from which to develop song structures."

McMahon has played the instrument since age eight. He began by picking out radio songs by ear, and then underwent five years of classical study. "But I always kept up with contemporary radio stuff," he adds.

Along the way Andrew developed an appreciation for vintage '70s and '80s pop. "Billy Joel is probably my favorite," he says. "And I love the great '70s Elton John, when he was at the best part of his youth, writing those angst-filled songs. And Freddie Mercury. Definitely Freddie Mercury." Another old-school obsession is Toto. "They're great," he insists. "'Africa,' 'Hold the Line,' 'Rosanna' are three of the most excellent pop trinkets of the '80s." Among newer

writers, McMahon admires Ben Folds, Fiona Apple, and Adam Duritz of Counting Crows. "My musical goal in life has always been to touch people the way that first Counting Crows record did to me," he says.

McMahon tours with a Yamaha U3 upright. "The choice of an upright is partly a matter of logistics, given where we are in our career," he explains. "But I also like the fact that the upright looks so rock, while a grand piano can have a certain pretentiousness associated with it. At some point I might love a grand, but for right now, the upright is it."

Why a Yamaha? "Because the U1 is the best sounding road piano in existence. At one point, we got one as a rental for a gig. As soon as I played it, I said, 'This is the piano I want!' You can get a lot of depth out of it — in fact, it's the closest you can get to a grand piano sound in an upright. I give it very high marks for tone, reliability, and feel, plus it takes a beating pretty well. We're stoked to play Yamaha."

McMahon says he tends to record the instrument in a straightforward manner: "There were a couple of times when we recorded in half-time and then sped up the tape just to get a different sound, but mostly it was just straight-ahead stuff with great mic placement. Live, we use a combination of five pickups: three Sennheisers, a Barcus-Berry, and a Bounty. Our sound guy is a wiz."

Perhaps one reason Something Corporate manages to touch such a broad range of listeners is that Andrew McMahon never talks down to his audience. "People tend to underestimate what kids will comprehend and what they'll connect to," he says. "Maybe the subject matter of our music applies most directly to a younger age group, but the things I sing and write about are universal concepts that we have all been through at one time or another. And I believe that the more honest I am with myself, the more people get it."

**SOMETHING  
CORPORATE**



Brian Ireland  
Drums  
Yamaha  
Maple Custom

Clutch  
Bass

William Tell  
Guitar

Josh Partington  
Guitar

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people get it."**

Andrew McMahon  
Vocals  
Yamaha U3 Upright Piano