

radar: the head and the heart

quick studies

the head and the heart
 graduate from a seattle open
 mic night to the stage
 at *conan* in record time.
 by ellen carpenter.
 photographed by
 jon bergman



FROM LEFT: kenny
 hensley, jonathan
 russell, charity
 rose thielen,
 chris zasche,
 josiah johnson,
 and tyler williams.

Most new bands tend to hash out their first songs in dingy basements or bedroom "studios," staying up until morning, knocking back Budweisers, and trying not to wake their roommates. But not Seattle folk-rock group the Head and the Heart. "We'd all get together in the local library," says singer-guitarist Jonathan Russell nonchalantly, as if practicing in the stacks is a totally normal thing for a band to do. Turns out the central branch of the Seattle Public Library has two piano practice rooms, and that's where Russell and singer-guitarist Josiah Johnson pieced together their first single, "Down in the Valley" in the spring of 2010. "We lasted in there a few weeks before they finally were like, 'We like the song you keep playing over and over again, but people are trying to read. So we're gonna have to ask you guys to leave.'"

These days you'd be hard-pressed to find anyone who would shush the Head and the Heart. A DIY success story, the band self-released their debut album—a collection of earnest, harmony-laden sing-along songs reminiscent of early Jayhawks—last summer and it immediately became a word-of-mouth indie hit, earning them spots opening for Vampire Weekend and Dave Matthews. Majors came calling, but the band held out for Sub Pop, and the label rereleased their album in April. The day I speak with Russell, he's wandering around the Burbank lot of *Conan*, where the six-piece will make their national TV debut that evening. It's all still a shock. "I remember all the nights eating Ramen and living on a couch [when it] didn't seem like things were actually happening." He pauses, clearly overwhelmed. "Wow, this is really crazy!"

Their ascent was quick. The group

came together a year and a half ago, after Russell and Johnson met at a weekly open mic night at Seattle's Conor Byrne pub. They were both new to the city and had planned on pursuing solo music careers, "but we seemed to work really well together," says Russell.

At Conor Byrne they also met pianist Kenny Hensley and bassist Chris Zasche; violinist and singer Charity Rose Thielen joined the group after improvising with them during a performance one night. "It was just magical, chemistry-wise," Thielen says. "I knew after playing with them, This is it." Soon they had all quit their day jobs

(Thielen, who could easily pass for Michelle Williams's younger sister, was a manager at Anthropologie) and started devoting all their time to the band.

Russell admits he was was wary when the band first started getting approached by labels. "We didn't want to just be this Mumford & Sons overnight success," he says. "We enjoy touring small circles and then a bigger ring, and you come back and they bring friends and then somebody online on the East Coast is like, 'My friend in Idaho told me about you!' And that's way cooler than, 'Hey there's this band that I saw on TV.'" He laughs. "Although here we are about to do a TV thing..."

► itunes.com/theheadandtheheart

**band
 crush**
**jonathan
 cohen**
 music booker

appomattox I heard one of their albums in a bar last year and hunted them down and started going to all of their shows, a couple of which have been in abandoned storefronts or weird venues in Bushwick, Brooklyn. They're a trio with the energy of early Police and Fugazi, and the lyrics have a bit of a political edge to them. I think their song "Either Way" is a hit in waiting. Jonathan Cohen has served as the music booker for *Late Night With Jimmy Fallon* since the show launched in March 2009. Prior to that, he spent nine years as a writer and editor for *Billboard*.

