



# IRASCIBLE MUSIC



IDA MAE (UK)

Album: Chasing Lights

Label: Vow Road

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Web: <https://idamaemusic.com>

EPK: [irascible.ch/releases/ida-mae/chasing-lights](https://irascible.ch/releases/ida-mae/chasing-lights)

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“We wanted to make something simple and honest and raw,” says Chris Turpin, one half of the breakout British duo Ida Mae. “We wanted to make a record our way, with no compromises.” That brand of fiercely unconditional commitment – to the songs, to the sound, to each other – has defined Ida Mae from the start, and it courses through the veins of the band’s brilliant debut, ‘Chasing Lights.’ Blending elements of vintage Delta blues and gritty rock and roll with boldly modern arrangements and fearless punk swagger, the record captures Ida Mae in its purest form, with Turpin and his longtime musical partner Stephanie Jean performing nearly everything live in the studio under the guidance of legendary producer Ethan Johns (Ray LaMontagne, Laura Marling, Kings of Leon). It’s an electrifying collection, the kind of record that feels both familiar and groundbreaking all at once, fueled by dazzling musicianship, breathtaking harmonies, and the sort of versatile, timeless songwriting that’s earned the band tour dates with everyone from Greta Van Fleet and Blackberry Smoke to Marcus King and The Lone Bellow.

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One listen to “Chasing Lights” and it all seems meant to be, but the record might never have happened if Turpin and Jean weren’t willing to, quite literally, bet the house on themselves.

“We were living in this tiny little place in my hometown of Norwich when we started writing these songs,” Turpin remembers. “We had enough money to live there for six months, so we turned the entire downstairs into a studio and gave ourselves that window to write and demo as much as we possibly could. We knew we had to land a deal in that time or it would be game over.”

Turpin and Jean were no strangers to the music industry by that point. The pair had earned widespread critical acclaim everywhere from the *BBC* to the *NME* with their raucous first group, Kill It Kid, but they walked away from it all when their major label deal turned sour. Rather than view the band’s dissolution as a setback, though, Turpin saw it as an opportunity to get back to his roots, to create the kind of sound he’d imagined a decade earlier when he and Jean were still just students attending university in Bath.

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“When we met, I was hitting every open mic I could find playing old-time acoustic country blues—Robert Johnson, Charley Patton, Mississippi Fred McDowell—and Steph was singing jazz from a similar era: Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, Bessie Smith, that kind of thing,” explains Turpin. “It was like we were two sides of the same coin. One day I heard a recording of Blind Willie McTell and his wife performing together, and I realized that Steph would be perfect, so I asked her to sing with me.”

The first song the pair ever harmonized on was Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee’s “Ida Mae,” and the name seemed like a natural fit when it came time to launch their new project, which just happened to roughly coincide with their marriage.

“Steph and I have been best friends ever since we started playing music together,” says Turpin. “Our relationship was a working one before it was ever a romantic one, and the bonds we formed on the road as bandmates made for a really deep foundation. People ask what it’s like to write and record with your partner, but the truth is that it’s the only thing we’ve ever known. Creatively, artistically, this is the way we’ve done it for our whole careers—I’m often the main writer and Steph is the editor—and we’re incredibly lucky that it works so well.”

The duo’s natural chemistry proved to be an ideal fit for Ethan Johns’ minimalist approach to production. Johns, who also plays drums on the album, pushed the band to record straight to tape with little rehearsal, encouraging them to rely on their instincts in order to capture the songs in the most raw and real manner possible.

“Ethan records live and very quickly,” explains Turpin. “He loves the naïve discovery of early takes. He loves the mistakes and the pure unthinking nature of those performances. It could be terrifying at times, but we always trusted his judgment.”

While the sessions were recorded with an old school approach, the album is by no means a throwback. Juno synthesizers and Korg drum machines flesh out the arrangements with distinctly modern touches (one track even features a percussion loop created on an iPhone), and Turpin often found himself running his historic 1930’s National resonator guitar through pedals and amplifiers to manipulate the sound.

“We didn’t want to just go into the studio and rehash old records,” Turpin says. “Incorporating synths and drum machines and string samples and experimenting with guitar tones was a way for us to offset the traditional roots nature of a lot of the music we were recording.”

That juxtaposition of sonic eras is immediately apparent on album opener “Boom Boom Boom,” a scathing takedown of toxic masculinity that features retro production alongside futuristic guitar work from Dweezil Zappa, who reached out to the band over Instagram to express his appreciation for their music. The pulsating “Higher Than The Light” channels Bo Diddley via Led Zeppelin, while the Beat poet-inspired “My Girl Is A

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Heartbreak” merges heavy blues and deep funk grooves, and the tender “Easily In Love” pairs moments of hushed intimacy with soaring emotional grandeur.

“A lot of these songs sort of hint at us and our relationship,” says Turpin. “You can’t help but write yourself into almost everything. But most of our work is actually inspired by the people we know and the places we’ve seen on the road.”

While the pair now calls Nashville home, one of Turpin and Jean’s earliest introductions to America was a road trip across the Deep South, which they embarked upon a few years back as something of a musical pilgrimage. Their field recording of the birds above Robert Johnson’s grave opens “Rightfully Honestly,” a soulful, romantic ode to two lovers whose relationship rescues them from themselves, while a sampling of voices captured in a New Orleans dive bar leads into “Feel Them Getting Closer,” a swampy strut about escaping the shackles of normalcy. Perhaps no track sums up the band’s journey better, though, than the gently gorgeous title track, which finds Turpin and Jean’s voices twisting and turning around each other like beautiful, tangled vines.

As long as Steph and I have known each other, this is what we’ve done,” reflects Turpin. ““Chasing Lights’ is a metaphor for everything we’ve been after, for tracing the footsteps of our heroes, for making a life and a living on our own terms.”

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