

NORTHERN SOUL

Singing in his native Swedish, Dungen's Gustav Ejstes **pushes the confines of musical genres**—and moves beyond the ABBA paradigm. By Deirdre Corley

IT'S HARD TO KEEP A STRAIGHT FACE LISTENING to Dungen leader Gustav Ejstes reminisce about discovering retro rock while digging through record bins and growing up as one of the only hip hop enthusiasts in Lanna, Sweden. With his flowing, rock-god golden locks and lanky frame, the 25-year-old musician is far more Robert Plant than Snoop Dogg. Half-jokingly asked about his hometown rap scene, he deadpans, "It was just me and one other guy." The conversation seems only more bizarre when considering the style of music he plays. "It's probably a mix between Swedish folk music and Jimi Hendrix and hip hop," he says. "That's what I've had to listen to so far in my life."

Dungen's U.S. debut, *Ta Det Lugnt*, is an acid-soaked, psychedelic freakfest, sung entirely in Swedish. With happy rays of Swedish folk music shining through layers of 60s-style electric guitar, Scandinavia has never sounded so far away from Compton.

Treading heavily on such a well-worn musical ground as psych rock can be a dangerous undertaking for even the most talented artist. Most retro rock genres are beyond the point of innovation, and critics often cry foul when a new artist tries too hard to emulate his predecessors. But *Ta Det Lugnt* is the product of a man with a plan. Playing just about every part on the album himself, from guitar to percussion to a couple of blistering flute solos, Ejstes has created an album that is as impressive musically as it is earnest. As such, it has garnered critical acclaim here and abroad.

But Ejstes isn't worried about the critics. In fact, he's not worried about much of anything, as he proved with the new album's title, which translates from Swedish as "Take it Easy." "I am pretty amazed that I have done so



well, I never had any intention of being a big star," he admits. "So this is just a bonus for me to come here and have people appreciate it."

As a freshly hatched rock star, Ejstes has been spending quite a bit of time on the road promoting his album, completing a European tour earlier in the year and traveling to New York for several gigs this past summer, with an expanded North American lineup this fall.

Insular American ears have never been particularly keen on foreign language pop albums, but Dungen's saccharine melodies hold a hint of familiarity that goes a long way toward breaking down the language barrier. Ejstes recalls his surprise at seeing an American teenager in the crowd at one of his first New York shows singing along to his songs in Swedish.

"I knew he didn't know the lyrics, but he knew the sounds and it was really great. Some people are in it, even if they don't understand."

Gridskipping all over the world—it's just part of the job. Gustav Ejstes sounds off on top trips, the tropics, and an ideal tour stop...

Best Trip: "Costa Rica—I experienced everything from the beaches to the rainforest."

Favorite European City: Edinburgh

Least Favorite European City: "I want to have all these gigs and tours, so I don't want to say anything."

Best Band Discovered on the Road: The Research

Fantasy Travel Destination: "Polynesia is as far away from Sweden as you can get."