

Los Angeles Times CALENDAR weekend

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BUZZ BANDS

Mt. Egypt: honestly, he's lucky

He's lived in his van for the better part of this year. His preferred mode of transportation is his skateboard. And his debut album, "Battening the Hatches," which he concedes sounds more like a demo, was recorded in myriad "bedrooms, basements and living rooms." So what is 25-year-old skater kid (and a former pro boarder at that) **Travis Graves** doing opening for the **Flaming Lips**? "Shaking with fear," says Graves, who performs under the name **Mt. Egypt**. "And my guitar was shaking with me." Of course, a kind word here and an introduction there from the Lips' **Wayne Coyne** helped calm the jitters of the newbie whose forthright folk songs sound so brittle, they might break at the clap of a hand. The unpolished "Battening" unfolds like a troubadour's living room show, recalling a stripped-down **Neil Young** on "NYC . . .," a song that calls out poseurs who "act so punk-rock and so ghetto and yet they have trust funds." Honesty is Graves' recurring theme — not surprising from a guy who recorded one of his father's songs from a long-defunct '70s band. "In some ways I feel like I'm carrying the torch," says Graves, whose homemade CDs earned him a contract with **Record Collection** last fall. "It's only by luck and by chance that this happened to me." **Mt. Egypt's** improbable roll continues, with four Oc-



Courtesy of Travis Graves

BOOSTER: *Flaming Lips' Wayne Coyne, left, with Travis Graves.*

tober dates opening for label mates the **Walkmen** and three (including Nov. 30 in Thousand Oaks) opening for **Willie Nelson**.

Mt Egypt

IT IS REALLY DIFFICULT to sum up Travis Graves in a few words. Or even, for that matter, in an interview—a good guy full of random thoughts is one way to put it. His new record *Battening The Hatches* just came out, so you should go buy it. I'm sure if you can sit through this interview you'll love it. Once I asked Travis if he was to be killed by any animal, what kind would he like it to be? He responded after thinking long and hard, "Unicorn. Definitely a unicorn. You know, the horn right through the heart." Enjoy. —Leo Fitzpatrick

Your name's Travis Graves, but the group's name is Mt Egypt. How did that come up?

I call the music Mt Egypt because I first started recording the music at my dad's house out in the woods, in close proximity to what is known as Mt Egypt, a small wooded mountain. We used to have The Graves, which would be a good name for a band if it weren't my last name. My friend Greg's band, Boa Constrictor, has a good name. **We both met at Tampa Am. Since then has skating taken a back seat to music or is it still a part of your everyday life?**

I still skate almost everyday, especially if I'm in New York. I've been in LA for a couple months now and I've been surfing more than skating. Skating is key to my enjoyment of life though.

Could you name some of your influences? They don't have to be famous or even musical.

Wind, the ocean, cities, trees, all my lovely friends. My mom and dad, coffee, tea, Tom Curren, Will Oldham, Neil Young, Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, Gino Iannucci, Little Rory.

"Me and Gardy used to take naps under the shirt racks."

We were in LA and your seven inch had just come out, and for some reason the record store put a sign saying that it was produced by Will Oldham. You went in and corrected them instead of living off it and probably selling more records. Why did you do that?

I don't like to lie. I have no idea why it said that above the record. It wasn't true, I had to change it. **Typical day in your life?**

Wake up late, especially in the hot summer. I like to stretch out, eat breakfast, get caffeinated as a tit mouse, play music, and then go skate or surf. In the evening I hang out with a myriad assortment of interesting characters. I've been living in my tour van for the last two months so things are always changing.

Would you change it in anyway?

Not at all. I have a very good life.

Most of your friends are skateboarders, professionally and otherwise. Name some of your favorite people to hang out with.

Leo Fitzpatrick for all the late-night New York debauchery. Kenny Reed for the cheese and crackers. Tony Cox for the strenuous public dance routines. Jordan Tappis for teaching me how to surf. Greg Gardner for Ben and Jerry's and the latest Pentangle record. Toby Shuall for walking the dogs beyond the golf course.

What do you think about the record industry? What about the label you're on now?

I'm lucky to be on Record Collection. They give me money to live and I get complete artistic freedom. I don't do anything I don't want to do. We have a really good thing going on.

How do you write the music? An everyday thing or does it just come when it comes?

The songs just come into my head at random times. I can't really make them happen. Skating is a great way to figure out what instruments I want to use when recording.

This is probably the only time in your life you will ever get to do this so enjoy it. Do you have any shout outs?

You, Greg Gardner, Malcolm Pullinger, Steven Kurtz, Mike Piscitelli, Jordan Tappis, Record Collection/True Love Records, Kenny Reed, Tony Cox, Toby Shuall, my mom and dad and all my family, Cameron Richardson, Brian Degraw, Tim DeWitt, Ben Cho, Pascal Stansfield, Little Rory. I love all of the above mentioned.

Compare some of the places you've lived.

NYC is late-night alcoholic, girl-chasing maniac. SF is Land's End trail-lurking, China Beach-swimming, hill-bombing fog observer. LA (in my van) is surfing Brodie Von Snarch in search of cosmic interluuuuuuuuuuuddes.

What's the best trick you've ever done?

I've honestly never done anything that difficult or interesting on a skateboard, save the one time I narrowly missed becoming one with a car whilst bombing a hill in the avenues on a cruiser board that had been using marijuana.

Who were some of your old sponsors?

The Bullpen skateshop in Danville—me and Gardy used to take naps under the shirt racks. Trust skateboards. Jim hooked me up with Real boards for a long time, and then I rode for Supernaut for a little while. Thanks to all those dudes for all the equipment. Shaka.

Somehow skaters know to come see you. Does it ever freak you out to see these guys you admired through skating watching you?

Yes it does. My music can be very wuss at times and skating can have kind of a macho-going. It really stokes me out though to get to play for people who've inspired me my whole life. Thanks for the support my fellow shredders. Skate or die. ♣

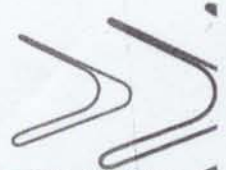
THRASHER

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travis GRAVES of Mt. Egypt



"I'm more of a street dude," says Mt. Egypt's Travis Graves.

"I'm definitely wild in the streets." But, no, the 25-year-old folk-rock singer isn't making a reference to the seminal Circle Jerks album.

Graves' skating career consists of sponsorship as an amateur for Supernaut five years ago. "I rode for them, and I went on tour with a hurt ankle, and I never really tried to be a pro skater after then," he recalls.

Picking up the guitar instead, Graves took his unique mix of rock and folk, and, after a number of name changes, settled on performing and recording under the moniker of Mt. Egypt. With the help of a professional skater friend, Graves signed to Record Collection Music last Halloween (his new album *Battening The Hatches* comes out July 22).

Graves hasn't given up on the street course (his Web site had a news update talking about the wrist he broke while skating last winter) and admits that skating definitely seeps into musical realm. "Skating is definitely rhythmic," he says. "It's more like dancing. My favorite skaters dance. I write a lot of songs when I'm skating, too." As for why he never became that quintessential punk rocker, Graves explains, "I think folk music can be as extreme as some gnarly punk shit. Plus, life's already hectic enough, so there's no need to get any more wild!"

ELLE girl



DAMIEN RICE Jasmine rice? Sticky rice? Brown rice? No—Damien Rice! This Irish singer-songwriter has stolen our hearts with his wistful tunes. We ain't on Atkins; we get a serving of Rice every day by listening to his album *O*.

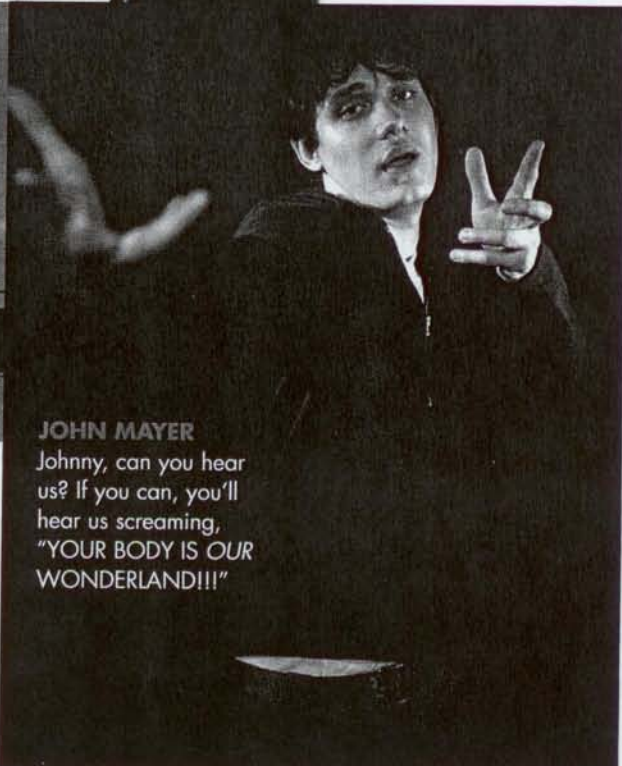


BRANDON FLOWERS Although his moniker could double for a porn-star name, we won't hold it against this hottie-bo-bottie singer of the rock-dance group the Killers. Make us dance, Brandon. Make us dance.

MT. EGYPT
If you're thinking to yourself, *Hey, that isn't a mountain, you're right!* Mt. Egypt is actually Travis Graves, a singer-songwriter who is also a pro skateboarder. We'd like to be his betty.



ANDRE 3000
He's the man behind that incredibly catchy song "Hey Ya," which makes us want to shake-shake-shake-shake it until the cows come home. Moo. He's quite a snappy dresser, too.



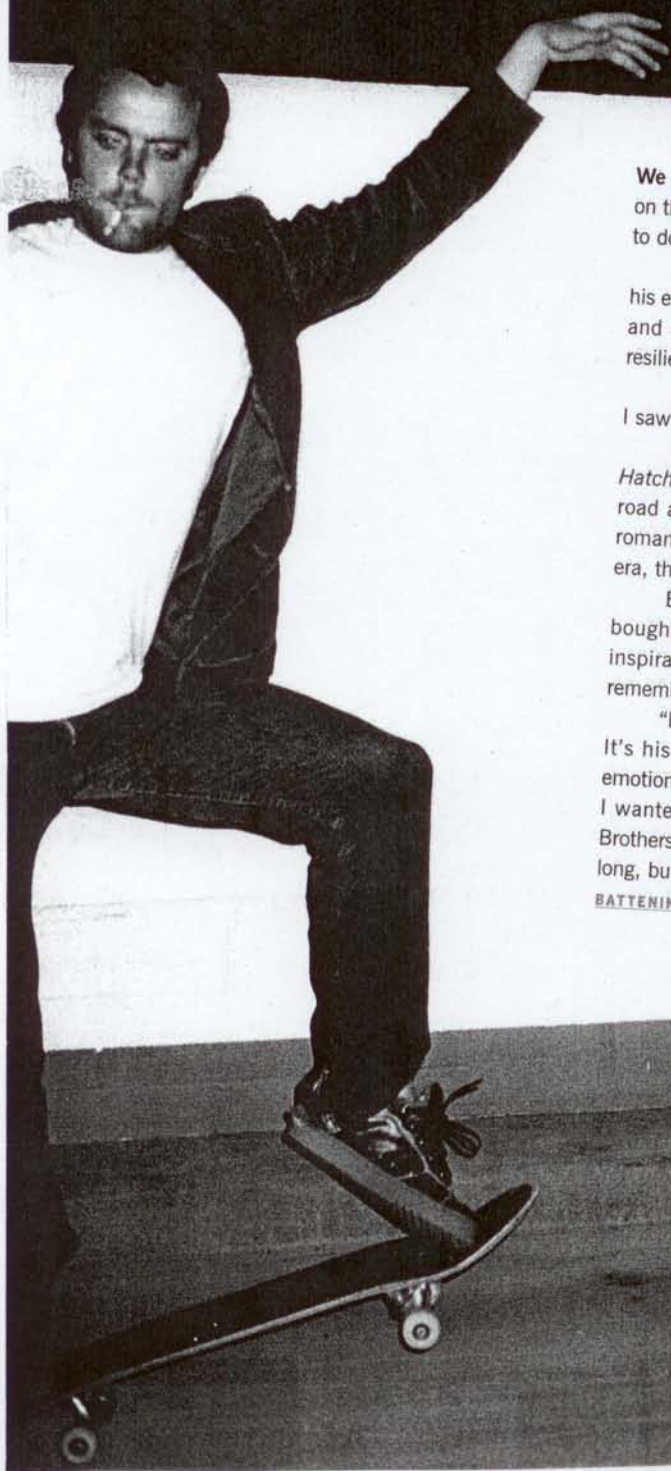
JOHN MAYER
Johnny, can you hear us? If you can, you'll hear us screaming, "YOUR BODY IS OUR WONDERLAND!!!"

MOUNT EGYPT

TEXT WILL JENKINS PHOTOGRAPHY MIKE PISCITELLI

RECORDED ON HIS TRAVELS ACROSS AMERICA, TRAVIS GRAVES' REINCARNATION AS MOUNT EGYPT IS FINALLY BREAKING THROUGH.

RESISTANCE
DAZED



We all need reminding of our failings from time to time. Some people rely on their friends, some on partners or family members. Only the brave prefer to do the job themselves.

Under the title *Mount Egypt*, Travis Graves has plumbed the lows of his early 20s for a collection of personal songs that are disparate, foreboding and unsettled. However, taken together the songs reveal an underlying resilience and tenacity.

"I've made this music over the past two years," says Travis, "Once I saw the songs as weary, now I see them more as defiant."

Recorded in drifts between New York and California, *Battening The Hatches* is as peripatetic in its production as its heart. The feel is "on the road and under the stars". Scratched, crackling tape sounds afford the romantic room to believe these campfire ballads resonate from a bygone era, that of pre-war bluesmen like Pinetop Smith and Charley Patton.

But as he thumbs his guitar under the awning of his camper van bought for him by his label, Record Collection, Travis identifies his inspirations from points in the evolution of American song that we can remember more readily.

"I love Neil Young's *After The Goldrush*, especially 'On The Beach'. It's his voice, which can falter and still register the most complex of emotions. But, oh man, for me Will Oldham was a big signpost for where I wanted to go. I was really into (Oldham's 1993 incarnation) Palace Brothers. It has that feeling, which I hope is on my album, of losing for so long, but then suddenly breaking through."

BATTENING THE HATCHES IS OUT NOW ON RECORD COLLECTION.

VICE

Mt. Egypt

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Battening the Hatches Record Collection

It's a fact, and you can't deny it any more than I: Every time Simba's mom dies in *Lion King*, you start bawling like a little kid who just ate shit trying to pop a wheelie off a ramp. And I guarantee you'll start to sniffle when

you hear this, too. Nah, there's no "Hakuna Matata" or any other Disney-style medley action, but Mt. Egypt packs all of the sand and pebbles that ended up in that little kid's scraped hands, knees, and chin, along with the wailing of an animal-kingdom funeral procession, into these beautiful and subdued desert lullabies. Fuck, he's so good he even opened for Willie Nelson.

ANGEL NELFI