

## VANGOUGH

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Oklahoma City based powerhouse Vangough may be named after a post-impressionistic artist, come from a conservative bastion of the U.S. and draw inspiration from heavy guitar driven 90's prog-rock metal bands like Dream Theater; yet driven by the explosive, cutting edge vision of guitarist and lead vocalist Clay Withrow, the band's incisive and infectious songs - 13 of which appear on Vangough's critically acclaimed indie debut *Manikin Parade* - and intense energy requires adjectives far beyond words that describe mainstream artists. So here's an opening attempt: committed to drawing listeners into their melodies before totally upending the tea table, they spit fiery madness by drenching your ears with a purple sunrise of melodic cocaine and a not-so-subtle approach to reading you the story behind today's headlines.

Originally formed around Withrow's well-received 2007 solo debut *Dissonance Rising* and evolving through a small series of key personnel changes, Vangough - whose current killer lineup includes drummer Brandon Lopez, keyboardist Abe Hartley and bassist, cellist and violinist Carlton Dorsey - combines the Dream Theater vibe with melodies inspired by early video game music such as Mega Man. Their vintage synth sound harkens back to Yes, Genesis and Styx, giving them a slightly classic rock feel while retaining the freshness of a forward thinking contemporary band.

If you swirled all those bands into a blender, popped them into frappe mode and could handle the blast of biting social commentary, blistering axes and sensual atmospheres, the result would sound a bit like Vangough with its Gilmouresque guitar solos, silky smooth Daniel Gildenlöw/Pain of Salvation vocals, soaring keyboard melodies and tight double bass drumming reminiscent of Dream Theater's Mike Portnoy. Metal to Infinity says it best: *"You can expect nothing but awesome compositions on Manikin Parade ... expect the unexpected, each song comes on strong with several forms of varied, sometimes mystical atmospheric moments."*

Admittedly, their sound is ultimately a bit expansive to be confined to the OKC rock scene, but Vangough's developed an enthusiastic, champing at the bit loyal following to build on. This year, they made their second consecutive appearance at Tulsa's Dfest (Diversafest), Oklahoma's version of South By Southwest that attracts over 60,000 fans; Vangough opened for Brooklyn dub-rock crossover band Dub Trio. The band also plays a regular gig at the local hotspot Sauced and has headlined over the past year at such venues as Rock Theatre, VZD's and The Deli, just up the road in Norman.

The singer met Lopez at the OKC Guitar Center where Lopez works as Drum Manager and told him he needed a great drummer to help take his current project to the next level. Lopez's skinning on such tracks as "Disorder Quotient" was so powerful and raised the bar so high that it inspired Withrow to find other great local musicians to collaborate with. The band concept for Vangough gradually took shape and, after going through several drummers who played with the group live, Lopez - who founded a Christian death metal outfit called Broken Flesh - eventually joined as a permanent performing member.

*"The vibe that we developed as Vangough often leads to our being categorized as progressive metal," says Withrow, "but we're not quite heavy enough for metalheads and probably too heavy for everyone else below that bar. So it's more like eclectic rock or melodic metal. Balancing the heavy guitars, I really like to emphasize the melodic nature of every song, which is more important than heaviness and complexity for their own sake. I'm always trying to write hooks that draw the listeners in and sticks with them. Each song on Manikin Parade makes its own statement and gets on its own soapbox addressing different issues. The effect musically and lyrically is a combination of endearment and elements that are bound to slightly offend people's sensibilities. It's cool to draw them in with the beautiful nature of the music and then abruptly shock them - but that's rock and roll, isn't it? Music should stand for something and always be on the edge."*

Withrow likes to call all of his songs *"fun, but that's only if one's definition of fun extends to mean "powerful and pointed."* *"Christmas Scars," which begins aggressively and angry but evolves into a graceful, spacey serenity by the end, is a much needed direct attack on our celebrity worship culture and how much time and energy we invest in these people who in the end, are just people like us.*" Sample lyric: "Come sit with me and together we can harp on your society of mediocrity." *"The crunchy, propulsive title track "Manikin Parade" is a biting satire on our society's encouragement and glorification of anti-intellectualism - as if intellect is a threat to family values. It's the ultimate call to think for ourselves. Religion is another sacred cow that Vangough taps into, painting portraits of abusive Catholic priests from both the victims' and priests' perspectives on "Disorder Quotient" and attacking Scientology and its foibles and celebrity adherents on "Paradise For The Lost." Tom Cruise better cover his ears!*

*"Because we're not afraid to tackle these themes that are taboo for mainstream bands, Vangough is like the South Park of music, and proud of it," says Withrow. "The best part of all this is just the opportunity to make music, to lay the foundations of a city, say, and then unleash a monster on it, watching the different elements interrelate as the songs evolve. But it's performing live that's the real addiction and we love nothing more than getting out there and connecting with fans. It's a major spiritual experience and I love the sensation of getting up there and transforming into that monster that's gonna take everyone on the journey with us."*

LINEUP:

Clay Withrow - vocals, guitars, bass, keyboards

Brandon Lopez - drums

Corey Mast - keyboards

*(new bass player will be announced soon)*

Website: [www.officialvangough.com](http://www.officialvangough.com) / [www.intromental.com/vangough](http://www.intromental.com/vangough)

Discography:

2010: Game On

2009: Manikin Parade

Labels:

Tba