

THE RADAR MUSIC

BY ALEXIS JOHNSON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY EVAN HURD

HERE COMES THE SON

Neo-hippie Beatles scion Dhani Harrison and bandmates drop their debut album

Dhani Harrison may be the spitting image of his father, but that hasn't paved the music-industry path for this waif-ish, mustachioed Beatle progeny. It's not that the labels weren't interested in thenewno2, the band British-born Harrison formed with drummer Oli Hecks, his longtime partner-in-crime, in 2006. "We were initially with Capitol and EMI, wasted a lot of time with Astralwerks, we were in chats with New Line, which got absorbed into Warner..." But, Harrison jokes, "Everywhere we've gone, we've killed the label." The partners took it as a sign. They will release their first album, *You Are Here*, on their own this month.

The duo, who produce heartfelt and moody multipart melodies, recently enlisted three scruffy musicians with serious street cred—Jonathan Sadoff, Jeremy Faccone and Jason Hiller—to take their "electro bluesy rock" project from studio seclusion to live performance. While Led Zeppelin remains a band favorite, Hecks cites the experimental Bristol scene of the '90s—with acts like Massive Attack and Portishead—as more potent influences. "We're revving up to be a real band now, as opposed to just a bunch of high-tech studio geeks," says Harrison.

The 30-year-old guitarist—who is named after two Indian scale notes, "dha" and "ni"—recently moved into a three-story loft near the beach with his wolf-like puppy, Woody Guthrie. Harrison relocated to L.A. from England in early 2001 to help complete his father's album, *Brainwashed*, with Jeff Lynne (lead singer of ELO). On it was "Marwa Blues," an instrumental track composed by Harrison Sr., who died in November of 2001. Harrison Jr. coproduced the song, which won him a Grammy in 2004.

Meanwhile, thenewno2 (a reference to the anonymous administrator on *The Prisoner*, a 1960s British secret-agent TV series) flowered when Hecks joined Harrison in L.A. soon thereafter. Together, the two wrote more than 50 songs, recording a dozen for *You Are Here*. The self-financed operation affords the band more freedom, but its members have kept their side projects, which range from video-game consulting (Dhani) to film scoring (Jonathan). "It didn't seem worth it [to sign with a label], because... they were going to own everything," says Harrison, who is all too familiar with



FAB FIVE From left: Jonathan Sadoff, Jason Hiller, Dhani Harrison, Oli Hecks and Jeremy Faccone.

the vagaries of the music industry. Famous case in point: The Beatles signed away their publishing rights, which netted Michael Jackson a fortune after he scooped them up in the '80s.

One of thenewno2's distribution channels is *Rock Band*, a *Guitar Hero*-esque video game that puts new music online. Gamers can download the tunes and actually "play" the songs with simulated instruments. The band is also trying out new memory-chip technology from chip giant San Disk that effectively turns cell phones into ad hoc iPods. "Everyone's been bummed out about the state of the music industry, but I think it's brilliant. No rules. You could go around tying your cassette to a tennis ball and throwing it over someone's wall—that's as valid as some of the random stuff that people have been doing in the last few years," says Harrison.

Self-styled guinea pigs, the members of thenewno2 are experimenting with delaying profits in favor of tech-savvy distribution, which Harrison says is done in the name of social uplift. It's all part of what he calls "the Nice One," an inclusive mantra that applies to everything good and positive. This includes a focus on giving listeners music through new technology and ignoring record sales in hopes of retaining an audience—that might then attract advertisers. "So that's what we're trying to achieve: positivity, people thinking for themselves, being nice to everyone. That's kind of what we're all about." It's a neo-1960s California optimism that shows Harrison's as over the self-indulgent, angst-ridden indie world as he is number-crunching execs. "I guess we're the new hippies or whatever that means. It is the 40th anniversary of the Summer of Love. It can be the Summer of the Nice One." ▣