

TRENDING

# EDM's Alternative Route

After conquering the pop charts, electronic music may invade alt-rock radio in 2018

BY KEVIN RUTHERFORD

**O**DESZA, SOFI TUKKER AND **Mansionair** are on the cusp of what may be a new trend in rock radio: electronic crossovers. EDM has made significant inroads at top 40 radio—and the top of the Billboard Hot 100—in recent years, with **The Chainsmokers**, **Zedd** and **Calvin Harris** and more finding chart success with dance-gear tracks. Now, the alternative and triple A (adult alternative) formats are getting into the game, with four songs by electronic acts dotting *Billboard's* Alternative airplay chart dated Jan. 20.

ODESZA, whose Grammy-nominated third album, 2017's *A Moment Apart*, reached No. 3 on the Billboard 200 last September, boasts two songs on these formats: "Line of Sight," featuring **WYNNE** and **Mansionair**, which peaked at No. 24 on Alternative, and "Across the Room," featuring **Leon Bridges** on vocals, which has become a top 10 hit at triple A.

**Harrison Mills**, one-half of ODESZA, says the pair didn't expect either song's success on alternative formats, but "we've always been big fans of indie-alternative. We're from the Northwest, where it's kind of king." Adds member **Clayton Knight**: "Electronic music has been around for a while, but now finally in the U.S. it's seeping into almost everything." He says radio crossover was never the goal when recording *Apart*: "If you start making music for platforms,

From left: ODESZA's Knight, Sophie Hawley-Weld of Sofi Tukker, ODESZA's Mills, Tucker Halpern of Sofi Tukker and Francis Farewell Starlite of Francis & The Lights.

**"Electronic music ... is seeping into almost everything." —Knight**

it's really transparent. It doesn't feel authentic." Dance music finding its way onto Alternative isn't exactly new: The Chainsmokers notched a top 20 alternative hit in 2017 with "Something Just Like This," featuring **Coldplay**, and **Avicii's** "Wake Me Up!" nearly reached the top 10 in 2013. Only now, more artists are joining in.

Recent key players include Australian trio **Mansionair**, whose own "Astronaut (Something About Your Love)" has ridden its distorted vocal hook to No. 37 on Alternative; Sofi Tukker's "Best Friend" (featuring **NERVO**, **The Knocks** and **Alisa Ueno**), leading the Alternative charge at No. 18, following its inclusion in an Apple ad; and

**Francis & The Lights**, whose "May I Have This Dance" remix with **Chance the Rapper** peaked at No. 36 on Alternative.

**Phil Kukawinski**,

program director of alternative WFUZ Scranton/Wilkes-Barre, Pa., spins all four songs. He says the decision to play the tunes on a historically guitar-driven format was a no-brainer: "The electronic sound has really taken off, and alternative as a format is in a new place," he says, adding that though some listeners are wary of the shift, "expanding their horizons is the main focus."

Bridges, already a budding star on triple A with a pair of top 10s on the format in 2015 and 2016 (including the No. 1 "Smooth Sailing"), says he linked with ODESZA to create "a window into what's next for me on my own project."

"When you make something that's tasteful and melodic, people are going to be drawn to it," he adds. "You just got to do it right." ●



From left: Watkins, Jarosz and O'Donovan.

UP NEXT

## I'M WITH HER... AND HER, AND HER

On Feb. 16, folk-pop power trio **I'm With Her** will unveil its debut LP, *See You Around*, a collection of fine-spun harmonies written to fiddles, ukulele and banjo, and co-produced by **Ethan Johns** (**Ryan Adams**, **Paul McCartney**). As the group gears up for a 2018 world tour, member **Sarah Jarosz** says the album title, taken from one of the first songs the act wrote together, couldn't be more fitting: "It set us off on this journey, and it really sets the tone of what's to come."

**DIFFERENT STROKES, ALL FOLK** Though the trio grew up in opposite corners of the United States, its members all developed complementary tastes: **Sara Watkins** played her parents' **Beatles** records in California, **Aoife O'Donovan** tuned in to her Irish father's Celtic radio show in Boston, and Jarosz got a mandolin for Christmas in Texas. Having since collectively released nine solo efforts and co-founded two bands (**Nickel Creek** and **Crooked Still**), O'Donovan says they were bound to link up: "We kept running into each other at festivals and through friends."

**MEET ME IN THE BATHROOM** A chance meeting in Colorado led to their first performance. A mutual friend texted them a last-minute request to open a show at Sheridan Opera House in summer 2014. "We crammed inside this bathroom and worked up 20 minutes of music," recalls Watkins. Choosing a band name was just as easy, and came long before **Hillary Clinton** picked the same one for her 2016 presidential campaign: "It has to do with camaraderie and sticking together."

**FAST FRIENDS** Scouring for "time pockets" between solo tours, the group spent a week writing at a Vermont farmhouse in December 2015. "We'd stop, have a beer and go in the hot tubs ... we watched an entire season of *Narcos*," says O'Donovan. The newfound bond seeped into their music: "When we go back and listen to voice recordings," adds Jarosz, "we're not able to tell who is who." —TATIANA CIRISANO



HAWLEY-WELD: HAL PERK; TUKKER: TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES; MILLS: MICHAEL TULLBERG/GETTY IMAGES; STARLITE: KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY IMAGES; KNIGHT: NATASHA MOUSTACHE/WIREIMAGE; I'M WITH HER: SHERVIN LAINZ.