

# ODESZA

By EMILY ZEMLER



**CLAYTON KNIGHT** and Harrison Mills, the duo who record and perform as

ODESZA, fully understand that, in order to create, you have to build something and then take it apart. And, on their new album, *A Moment Apart*, the electronic duo allowed experimentation to lead them forward before taking a step back and stripping down each song.

“It’s a simple idea that evolves into too much, so we have to pick out what fits and what doesn’t,” says Mills. “It’s an emotional process. You get attached to the sounds after you’ve been working on something for so long. Even though it’s not helping the song, you may have a personal preference for some of the elements. It’s a lot of trial and error. We’ve found that simplicity is best. That’s what’s crazy—the simplest song can be the hardest song to make. It’s something we’ve always known, but we’ve gotten better at it as time has gone on.”

ODESZA have been working on new material since the release of their last album *In Return*, which came out in the fall of 2014. They completed the opening and closing tracks first, using them as bookends, and then worked their way inward. Mills and Knight wrote the record on the road, as well as during sessions in Los Angeles and back in their Seattle studio. The extensive tour behind *In Return* impacted the pair’s new batch of songs, even though they didn’t intend it to.

“You might get too accustomed to trying to hit everything really hard or being really energetic on the road,” Knight says. “We actually come from a slow-tempo, ambient-style music background. But being on the road for two



years influenced us. It made the songs more energetic and helped these heavier, denser pieces be created.”

“You try to remove the live setting because we like to make more personal albums and more headphone music,” Mills adds. “It’s a little more intimate. If you let the live setting influence that too much, it takes away from that.”

*A Moment Apart* is a lush, sweeping collection of electronic tracks, bolstered more by arching melodies than thumping beats. Their initial idea was to pair upbeat, pop-laden hooks with a melancholy aesthetic, creating a balance between light and dark. The album opens with a quote from the film *Another Earth*, which Knight sees as a reflection of the songs’ overall sentiments. “If I had to put it into one word, the album’s theme is ‘perspective,’” he notes. “That quote says that in a lot of ways.”

As on previous efforts, the band collected a diverse array of vocalists to appear on the album, from Regina Spektor to Leon Bridges to Naomi Wild. It was Spektor, however, who really wowed the band.

“We’ve been fans of her for a very long time,” Mills says. “We told our manager—half-kidding—that we’d like to have her on the record because we didn’t think it was feasible. A month or two later, she emailed us saying she wanted to work with us.”

Spektor invited the band to her hotel room before a Seattle gig and sang the vocals she had written for a track they had previously sent her. The result was “Just a Memory.” Mills admits, “It was a pretty jaw-dropping moment.”

“It felt very circular for me, being such a fan of her when I was younger, never fathoming I would work with her one day,” Knight adds. “On the actual song, we were trying to

recreate that moment in the hotel for the listeners.”

Since the release of their 2012 debut album *Summer’s Gone*, ODESZA’s live show has taken on a life of its own. The pair now sells out venues like Morrison, Colo.’s Red Rocks and even headlined the Staples Center in Los Angeles in October. The musicians credit their festival runs, from Bonnaroo to Bumbershoot, for helping them reimagine their tracks in a live setting—onstage, everything has to be as high-energy as possible, which is not necessarily true for their albums.

“We consider our live show such a different beast,” Knight explains. “We rewrite almost every song for the live show. We have horns and we’re playing drums. There’s a lot of elements we try to add. Our albums are these more introverted experiences, and our live shows are extroverted, community-based experiences. We really try to match the setting of the place we play. When we approach live stuff, you really have to pick and choose your down moments. The contrast makes more sense than trying to make people have a meditative moment.”

The tour, which goes until the end of 2017, takes ODESZA to Australia, New Zealand, Europe and North America, and reveals a refreshed live experience. And, in certain ways, *A Moment Apart* is just a blueprint for the duo’s dynamic set.

“We spend so much time on our live shows,” Mills says. “We hoped for this level. We know we’re putting on a show and we want it to be theatrical and have a lot of different moments that shift and feel almost like a play. We want you to go on a journey in different genres of music and to encapsulate a lot of things within one show.”