

# Mighty Tracks

From their sold-out Madison Square Garden show to a North American tour in support of their new album, Above & Beyond are leaving their handprints everywhere

Words by Vanessa Pascale | Photo Credit: Amelia Troubridge



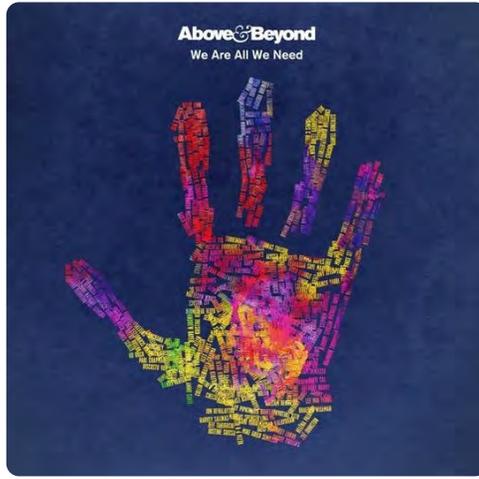
Paavo Siljamäki, Jono Grant and Tony McGuinness --the electronic DJs who comprise Above & Beyond-- are seated in a room in the Gansevoort Park Avenue Hotel, arm-to-arm on a white leather couch perpendicular to the ottoman I've situated myself on. It is minutes after their private set at the hotel and two days before their sold-out Madison Square Garden show (this past October) --the energy is palpable.

The London-based DJs / founders of music labels Anjunabeats and Anjunadeep are noticeably elated and still in disbelief over their upcoming show at the iconic venue on Saturday --especially since they are the first British electronic music group to headline and sell out the arena. "Management was like, 'You're going to do Madison Square Garden!' We're like, 'Yeah, right.' And then we're really doing it and you're like, if you don't sell it out, you have to pull the show.... Then, the

problem was that some couldn't get tickets. That's not nice either. Luckily, we got more seating. The more people, the better Madison Square Garden sounds," says Paavo with a smile.

Their Madison Square Garden show went off without a hitch with the massive crowd on their feet dancing and singing along to songs that included, "Sticky Fingers," "Blue Sky Action" and title track, "We Are All We Need" from their upcoming album, by the same name, slated for release January 20th. A&B stayed connected to fans by typing up messages like, "Music Unites Us" (from their laptop onstage), and projecting incredible visuals on the towering multi-screen backdrop. Here, the group also celebrated the 100th episode of their Group Therapy Radio Show and asked fans to utilize the hashtag #ABGT100 in honor of it. From Madison Square Garden on, it's nothing but blue sky action for the trio.

A&B ride into 2015 on a whirlwind that encompasses the release of their album, *We Are All We Need*, and 30+ date North American tour beginning in February. *We Are All We Need* is a 16-track compilation of music and lyrics the guys have been working on together for three years –with ideas for it gestating even further back, I’m told. Human connection rests at the epicenter of the album, and is visually depicted in the title track’s music video where they recreate *Thelma & Louise*’s profound bond. “One of the things that I’m really proud of, between us there’s a really interesting collection of songs that show different sides of us and our band. It really ranges from mellow stuff to techie club sounds, and everything in between. A lot of the songs are inspired by and talking about human relationships... and things we experience. I’m really happy. Well done, guys,” Paavo says. “It’s a great thing ’cause there’s more than one person involved. It’s less congratulatory, because the other two guys did work on it. When you look at it that way, it’s easier to enjoy it,” says Jono. Stamped on the album cover is a multi-colored handprint, an original piece of art developed by Big Active, consisting of the names of fans and the band’s.



In the early 2000s, A&B established themselves in the trance world with remixes of Chakra’s “Home” --which reached #1 on the UK club charts--, Aurora’s “Ordinary World,” Madonna’s “What It Feels Like For a Girl,” (who later came back and asked them to remix “ Nobody Knows Me”), Britney Spears’ “Everytime”... But there is more to them than creating catchy remixes, all three produce and write the songs for their albums. “We write from the heart. It’s honest. We’re not doing it for commercial reasons. We’re not hiring someone to write us a hit. We’d rather do it ourselves.

The way people get connected to bands and artists in other genres is by discovering their personalities through their music,” says Tony. They are also all well-versed instrumentally. “I was classically trained [instrumentally], but I was more into improvising,” Jono shares, “I’ve always been writing music --that’s always come first.” Paavo plays cello and piano; and Tony plays guitar, mandolin and ukulele.

Unfettered by electronic music confines, their musical tastes go above and beyond. The establishment of a strong fan base has given them the latitude to experiment outside of their recognized genre –namely, a foray into performing “unplugged” shows (in London and Los Angeles) and the release of their album, *Acoustic*, and film, *Live From Porchester Hall* (their unplugged concert). “It allowed me, the royal we, to make the kind of music we liked in the electronic dance realm. The thing about trance music, as a broad genre, is it’s very musical...” Tony explains, “If you like classical music, you can’t put that much of it in techno... If you like indie guitar music, like I do, you can’t put that in house music, but you can put it in trance music...” Essentially, trance music has allowed them to

during our interview further magnifies their dedication to creating work that is both significant in it’s capacity to unite people and foster emotional connections. “In a kind of philosophical, human sense, I think everybody wants to connect with other people. It’s something that really is incredibly important to human beings, that’s the reason why people spend so much time on Twitter and Facebook ’cause they want to feel like they’re part of something bigger than themselves and when you make music that people respond to and understand, that’s kinda like a big dose of that...,” Tony muses.

The trio is highly cognizant of the positive impact their music has on listeners, and embraces their role wholeheartedly. “There are very few things that I love more in this world than music. I’m an absolute fan of music. To be able to share that love of something that’s so close to me with so many people and in so many different ways, and on such a deep level, that’s the best part of the job. If you can call it job...” says Paavo. The subject is addressed with the utmost sincerity. The guys sit there silently, deep in thought, then Jono adds, “We’re lucky to be in a position to contribute something to the world that has very little negative --that can’t be said of many industries or jobs really.”

For more on Above & Beyond and their North American Tour visit: [www.aboveandbeyond.nu](http://www.aboveandbeyond.nu), [ustour.weareallweneed.com](http://ustour.weareallweneed.com). **ML**

encompass their affinity of a mélange of genres.

What drives them ultimately, in addition to doing what they love and traveling the world, is connecting with others through their music. Every thoughtful response they give me

**HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE EACH OTHER?**

**PAAVO**

“Paavo writes an awful lot of very emotional music that we come up with as a group. He’s somebody who is very connected to the emotional impact that our music creates and writes from that perspective. The stuff he’s gotten involved with in the show is to enhance that very thing. The whole visual system we’ve dreamt up, the communicating on screen with text, which Paavo’s largely driven, is there to help people connect emotionally to the music,” says Tony.

**TONY**

“Tony is very poetic with lyrics --that’s his specialist area. When there comes a point where we’ve got a vocal that needs cleaning up and tuning and tidying up, he’ll also does that. They’re the two extremes Tony operates in and everything in between,” says Jono.

**JONO**

“Often I feel like if we were just me and Tony in the team, we might do stuff that wouldn’t necessarily be understood by the world... Jono has this ability to bring back to the table musically. [He looks at Jono.] You’ve got that touch with what’s going on much more than the two of us. You’ve got the ability to put that in the music and make the music such that people can get it. That’s a real skill,” says Paavo.

**WHERE DO YOU GO WHEN YOU’RE IN MIAMI?**

“South Beach! It’s so tourist, but I love going to Ocean Drive, sitting at News Café and watching the world go by. Normally, I try and play golf when I’m in Miami Beach,” says Tony. “Yeah, News Café is the breakfast spot, definitely. We do rather large events here... The best year we had was playing the amphitheater three years ago. We did our own show there. It was amazing,” says Jono.

**A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE**

“Music is a language, and if you know how to communicate in a language you can make people feel a certain way through the music. When you take a riff or an idea in dance music --I can’t see how you can make it any bigger than you can make in dance music, in a sense, because it’s just so powerful on the dance floor in electronic form. I think that’s what’s so exciting, for me, about dance music. There are rock songs that have been turned into bootleg dance records that are almost bigger than the original rock song in their dance context, and that’s kinda incredible, I think,” says Jono.