

A person with light-colored hair, wearing a dark, long-sleeved sweater, is seen from the chest up, looking out of a window. The window shows a blurred cityscape with buildings and a bright sky. The overall tone is warm and slightly desaturated. The text is overlaid on the upper part of the image.

Vacationer

THE BEST OF WHAT'S NEXT



few weeks or just every month," Vasoli says. Now they're embarking on long stretches of near-daily performances. They recently toured with Asteroids Galaxy Tour, and now they're on the road with The Naked And Famous, playing to sold-out crowds at legendary venues like The Wiltern in Los Angeles.

It's a nice start for a band that conducted its first official practice less than a year ago, and released its debut album, *Gone*, just a few weeks ago. "I really can't expect that stuff," Vasoli says. "I've been doing music a long time, and I've definitely learned not to count any chickens. But I kind of look at it like I have this lottery ticket, and I'm just really hoping that there's something to it."

The lottery, though, is predicated on pure chance, with success left to the fickle hands of fate. You throw out a few bucks and wait to see if you've won. Vasoli never waited. He worked for this. Luck may have played a part, but luck alone can't induce dancing from intoxicated barflies well past midnight.

Vasoli has been creating music and playing in bands since middle school. He dabbled in pop-punk and ska, and kept dabbling. "I could never really find my thing," he says. "I was always experimenting, going in all different directions."

Eventually he met and began writing with *Gone* producers and members of Body Language, Matthew Young and Grant Wheeler, both of whom had immersed themselves in the circuitry-heavy scene of electronic music. Vasoli had been enjoying what he calls "the surface" of that genre. The two producers pushed him below the surface. They exposed him to house and dub-step, trip-hop and experimentalism. "I got extremely enlightened," says Vasoli. He picked up new influences. He armed himself with Aphex Twin and Ratatat. Learned of Jaga Jazzist and the instrumental hip-hop of J Dilla.

His breadth of knowledge grew deeper. It grew sharper. It combined with Vasoli's appreciation of modern acts like Beach House and The Radio Dept. "Real guitars and vocals over top of little organ drum machines and stuff like that," he says.

His focus on modern music didn't detract from his admiration of older artists. "It may be weird to say, but there's a barbershop feel to what we do," he says. "We got turned onto stuff like The Andrews Sisters and this band called The Free Design from the '60s that were all just crazy vocal-pop aficionados."

Yet, as with Vasoli's middle-school musical ventures, there was something missing, something he was still searching for but had no way to discern.

Hometown: Philadelphia

Members: Kenny Vasoli (vocals, bass), Greg Altman (guitar), Michael Mullin (vibraphone, keys, and trigger finger), Ryan Zimmaro (drums)

Album: *Gone*

For Fans Of: Vampire Weekend, Dale Earnhardt Jr. Jr., Lord Huron

by Nathan Spicer

It's 1 a.m. in this muggy Austin bar, and Vacationer have just set up their equipment. The SXSW attendees who'd come to see Class Actress have dissipated, leaving a scattering of late-night stragglers. A ring of patrons huddles around the bar. The dance floor empties, and stays empty.

And then Vacationer launches into its island-tinged electro-pop. Or as the band jokingly calls it, "Nu-hula." Live vocals and instruments mix with electronic beats and sampled Pacific island sounds. In come plinks and plunks of electric guitars and ukuleles, the wide whistle of woodwinds, galloping toms and four-on-the-floor beats. The flow of traffic reverses. Those about to leave, stay. Those outside, come inside. People forget the hour, forget their spent energy. They forget they're tired, hungry, and half-drunk. People start dancing. By the time Vacationer finishes their set, you can't see an inch of the dance floor.

"That's the dream," Kenny Vasoli—the band's lead singer, co-songwriter, and bassist—later says. "It was a really, really cool experience."

Like those curious music fans that had trickled in from the streets, Vacationer's sound has also grabbed the attention of the Internet and radio stations, not to mention well-established, headlining acts. "Before the new year, it was just a show every

He felt stagnant, in a sense, even with the expansion of his musical vocabulary and skill.

There was a "true" sound out there, somewhere, and maybe, Vasoli sensed, it was farther away than he'd thought. Maybe it was from places that that didn't sound like the slushy cold streets of Philadelphia, from which Vacationer unexpectedly hails, or the precise timing of Detroit's underground hip-hop. Maybe Vacationer needed something warm, something inviting. Sunny, even. Something that sounded like, well, vacation.

Vasoli had begun listening, on a lark, to music with tropical tones. One day, not thinking much of it, he told his bandmates he liked the twinkling chimes of the guitars and relaxed rhythms. Wheeler and Young said okay, and they took Vasoli, and they showed him a vault of limitless samples of the sounds he was after.

Vacationer had discovered the islands.

The song "Trip" channels a Polynesian feel while keeping electronic and pop elements intact. Slips of soft static appear and vanish, like a radio set by a sunbather on the beach, with its signal slightly off. The high whistle of a gibbon echoes from a rainforest canopy, far below. A trip-hop beat shuffles everything forward. Guitars warble into space. Reverb shades Vasoli's tenor. It all coalesces into a relaxed pop groove that maintains an energetic eccentricity. It's a kind of energy that keeps people listening.

YouTube put the music video for "Trip" — showcasing a man break-dancing by a waterfall, which was inspired by the film *The White Diamond* by Werner Herzog — on its main music page. Then blogs noticed. Then Downtown Records, who signed the band.

College and public radio stations came next. "There's a radio station called WXPB," says Vasoli, "that's a member-supported station in the Philly area that I just love. My mom called me the other day and told me she heard ['Dreamlike'] on there."

With such heavy production values, one would assume sterile recording environments would best accommodate Vacationer's talents. Not the case. They transport nu-hula to the stage, and they do it well.

Vasoli and the band (Ryan Zimmaro on drums, Greg Altman on guitar, and Michael Mullin on vibraphone, keys and trigger finger), reproduce the entire catalog of album sounds. Live. "[Mike will] live-sample stuff on the spot," says Vasoli, "and there's also extraneous trippy sounds that we have going on top of it. Also, Ryan has what's called an

SPD, which is basically a MIDI percussion pad... We're sampling so much, and there's so much real stuff... We try to make it hard to pinpoint who's doing what."

They're also comfortable playing stripped-down sets. Comedians Jason and Randy Sklar had approached Vacationer after the aforementioned SXSW performance and asked them to sit in on their podcast, Sklarbro Country. The only digital thing there was the laptop and mics. Vacationer were fine. That takes solid craftsmanship, to be able to erase the flourishes from a song, and still be left with something charming.

Because they can perform with or without much electrical input, they're well on their way to achieving their half-serious goal. "The whole motive with this band [is] to stay in warm climates and work in endless summer," Vasoli says with an audible smile. The group is fascinated by Don Ho's career. Ho played in front of copious crowds, night after night, without leaving the island. Vasoli would like to "do the nu-electro version of that."

But for now, they're enjoying their ride through continental U.S.. And that's all right. They've already exceeded expectations. "The fact that [Gone] is getting any kind of attention at all, it's kind of indescribable how happy it makes me," Vasoli says. "I feel like I have a new lease on life these days."

See? He's okay. So Vacationer haven't yet realized their dream of playing permanently on bleach-white beaches. So what? They're still taking us there — for a little while, anyway. Even if it's 1 a.m. in a muggy Austin bar, and we're tired, hungry, and half-drunk.

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