



On The Verge

# 5 ARTISTS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

## 01

### **James Justin & Co.** FOLLY BEACH, S.C.

Southern Son, So Far

• While traveling home from the Camp Barefoot festival in the West Virginia mountains, James Justin Burke reflects on his roots in a casual, honest drawl. "I'm a Southern man and that's always been a part of my life," he says, adding that he named his debut record—released last July—*Southern Son, So Far* because he never knows what might happen or where he may end up. "Anything can change," he says. The album blends acoustic Americana with rock and roll, foot-stomping country and slower ballads. And while Burke (guitar, banjo, vocals) brought the songs to the table for the recording, he enlisted childhood friend Bailey Horsley (banjo, harp, vocals) and Tom Propst (upright bass, vocals) to round things out in the live setting with "their own flavors and accents and [make] it special." Other friends and local musicians also lend their voices to tracks, including Dangermuffin and Band of Horses' Ben Bridwell, who recorded with Burke after a surf session near his home in Folly Beach, S.C. Although Neil Young is a big influence on his music, Burke says that Horsley describes the group's nontraditional folksy, roots rock best: "It sounds like Ben Bridwell, Jim James and Scott Avett had sex and had a kid." [www.jamesjustinmusic.com](http://www.jamesjustinmusic.com) Amy Jacques

## 02

**28 North** PITTSBURGH, PA.**Forged In Steel**

• Having opened for Dave Matthews Band, My Morning Jacket, Blues Traveler and Dickey Betts, the Steel City's **28 North** finds itself logging hundreds of dates on the road, while touring behind its recently released self-titled debut. The quartet's diverse live shows also draw from the band's large canon of unreleased material. "We have around 200 original songs," says 28 North singer/guitarist **Mike Lindner**. "Not all of them are arranged at this point, but the first rule is no two songs can sound alike." During 28 North's numerous opening stints, Lindner feels that the band has gained something from watching MMJ's "calm" onstage or Dickey Betts' "magical" guitar work—and expanded on its sound with an energetic fervor. But the band's ability to craft its own variations on classic rock motifs with an impressive ability to segue from shimmering vocal harmonies to a dual guitar attack has inspired the quartet to seek much more—bigger stages and an even larger catalog. "It will be cool when we get to the point where everyone knows us," says Lindner. "That's what we want. We're young—24, 25 years old—so by the time we're 50, maybe we'll have a thousand songs."

[www.myspace.com/28norththeband](http://www.myspace.com/28norththeband) ● *Randy Ray*



## 03

**Railbird** SARATOGA SPRINGS, N.Y.**Traditional Experimentalists**

• The sold-out Bowery Ballroom show that **Railbird** played early this year with hometown friends Phantogram is only one piece of evidence that things are happening fast for the Upstate New York ensemble. Ever since Railbird's debut in 2008, which featured Trey Anastasio Band bassist **Tony Markellis**, the band has churned out genre-splicing EPs faster than fans can count the band's influences. Built around the Billie Holiday-meets-Micachu vocals of **Sarah Pedinotti**, Railbird has evolved rapidly from traditional Americana to a sound that draws musically from Radiohead, Captain Beefheart, Ghanan highlife and dub reggae, and lyrically from the novels of William Gibson and Haruki Murakami. "I'd get really bored if I had to do something the same way every time all of the time," Pedinotti says. With each EP (packaged in hand-painted lunch bags), the bass lines have gotten heavier, the dual guitars have become more menacing, the drumming is more fractured and Pedinotti is more enchanting—occasionally complementing her sci-fi themes with hovering synthesizer and toy piano. That and she can play a mean blues harmonica. Talking about the band as if it's a car that the band members keep souping up, she says, "We'll always keep taking it apart, and sometimes we'll put up the fuzzy dice."

[www.myspace.com/railbirdmusic](http://www.myspace.com/railbirdmusic) ● *Josh Potter*

## 04

**Chief**

LOS ANGELES, CALIF./NEW YORK, N.Y.

**Bi-Coastal Rockers**

Four-piece rock outfit **Chief** stands with one foot on each side of the country. Vocalist/guitarist **Evan Koga** started playing music with fellow Californians **Danny Fujikawa** (guitar, vocals) and **Michael Fujikawa** (drums) when they all attended NYU in 2006. The brothers stayed in New York after graduation while Koga took a brief breather in LA. The band cycled through a handful of bass players until another LA native, **Mike Moonves**, enrolled in NYU. "We called him up to see if he could come play," says Michael, who sports an unkempt beard. "He came in two days, knew all the bass lines by heart." The band's full-length debut was produced by Emery Dobyns and released on Domino Records in late August. Of Chief's music, Danny says, "It's two guitars, bass and drums—so automatically, it's rock. But all four of us sing too, so it adds a folk element." His brother adds, "We all listen to a bunch of different music, but we all come together [tool]. Our common ground is late '60s and '70s rock and roll music."

[www.chieftheband.com](http://www.chieftheband.com) ● *Henric Beckenäs Nielsen*



## 05

**Frontier Ruckus** ORION, MICH.**Viral Americana**

• **Frontier Ruckus** formed in the aftermath of the economically prosperous 1990s and use that time period as its backdrop. "A central theme [of our songs] is a mall where my mom used to work, used as a metaphor for a huge container of memory," says songwriter **Matthew Milia**, who started Frontier Ruckus with banjo player **David Jones**. "These huge vacant buildings that are now just empty, full of memories of the vibrancy that they once had." The latest addition to Ramseur Records, Frontier Ruckus draws as much from The Band or Neil Young as it does Walt Whitman and Sherwood Anderson. "It's really just any American literature. That experience—dealing with the memories confined within a certain very specific and haunting locality," Milia says of the vivid literary influences in his songwriting. Live, the band's show is stripped down, folksy and showcases Milia's wavering tenor. "This is what I want to get back to," Ryan Adams even tweeted about the band's latest album, *Deadmalls & Nightfalls*. "Those tunes go forever." [www.frontierruckus.com](http://www.frontierruckus.com) ● *Pietro C. Truba*