

“HEY
DUDE, WE
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THIS YEAR
- FUCK
YOU!”

THE WAR ON DRUGS have had an extraordinary 12 months. On the eve of a major UK tour, *Uncut* finds ADAM GRANDUCIEL in an LA parking lot — looking back at our Best Album Of 2014, looking forward to the next one... and responding, at last, to Mark Kozelek's attacks. "It's not my fault he's older than I am!"

Story: Allan Jones | Photograph: Sophie Harris-Taylor





The War On Drugs, December 2014 (Granduciel, far right): "We're not in our twenties anymore, so we're not destroying our bodies every night"

IT'S CHRISTMAS EVE in Los Angeles and Adam Granduciel is out for an early morning drive when he gets a perhaps not entirely well-timed call from *Uncut* that basically forces him off the road. "I'm just going to have to pull into this parking lot up ahead," he says. "Hang on," he adds, "I'll be right with you."

A couple of minutes later, evidently safely parked, he is, and without much further ado, quickly fielding questions about The War On Drugs' 2014, the most spectacular year of their career to date, the band's third album, *Lost In The Dream*, an international breakout hit even then riding high in a majority of end-of-year best of lists, including our own, which it topped as Album Of The Year.

On December 18, The War On Drugs played their last date of 2014 at The Powerhouse in Auckland. By then, they'd been on the road since just before the album's release in March. Building on the success of 2012's *Slave Ambient*, the new record was released to great reviews that kept the band on tour for nine months, during which time they played nearly 200 shows.

"When the momentum around the album started to really build, it was like there was no stopping it," Adam reflects, sitting there in Los Angeles, in a parking lot, sounding a little giddy as the past 12 months come back into focus for him.

Lost In The Dream was an album inspired by personal trauma – a shattered romance, depression, anxiety, debilitating phobias, a host of insecurities – out of which Granduciel shaped a resonant masterpiece. It was also the album that made the best sense to date of the myriad influences, most totemic among them Dylan, Springsteen and Krautrock, that Adam had been streamlining since the band's debut album, *Wagonwheel Blues*, which had just come out when they played an unforgettable Club Uncut show at London's Borderline in October 2008 [see panel].

As a triumphant 12 months drew to a close, there was only one cloud in an otherwise clear sky – a rolling row with

Mark Kozelek. Smarting like a slipped arse, the notoriously cantankerous Kozelek took almost pathological umbrage after The War On Drugs drowned out his set at September's Ottawa Folk Festival. The subsequent spat left Granduciel by turns baffled, confused, angry, a little hurt and cautiously reluctant to say too much about it, until the subject came up towards the end of the following conversation...

UNCUT: Would it be safe to assume that 2014 went pretty much according to plan?

ADAM GRANDUCIEL: Honestly, we just kind of went with the flow. I think my team, the people around me, knew what they'd do if the album was successful, how the year would then play out. They were more confident than I was about how well it would do. I mean, I knew we'd made a good record, but when I turned it in to the label, I wasn't like, "Oh, man, this is the best thing we've ever done. It's going to be such a hit." I wasn't even thinking at that point about how it was going to do commercially or what it was going to do for the band's career. After what I'd gone through to make it, I was just relieved it was finished and coming out.

But then when we started touring in March and the early shows all sold out, we weren't expecting anything like that. And then the album came out to positive reviews and

we stayed on the road and I started to sense that something was building. The thing kept growing, and it's turned into a great ride. It's far surpassed anything I expected. You always hope for the best when you release a new record, but this has been way beyond anything I thought was possible.

What was the best you hoped for when the album came out?

I was really pleased and surprised at how well *Slave Ambient* did and I guess I just hoped *Lost In The Dream* would be received as positively, that it would seem like a step up from the last record. That's all I ever really wanted, to make something better than the previous record and that people would like it. Then at the end of the first week of the March tour, we played Chicago. We'd been booked into a room I thought would be too big for us to play at that time and it was a Sunday night, but it sold out. People just didn't want to leave and that's when I thought,

'Oh, wow. This is going in a direction I didn't expect.' Then we made it to California and all those shows were sold out

and the response to the new songs was great. People were already familiar with them and you start playing a song and they're cheering because they know what's coming next. The record had only been out for 10 days, so that was pretty amazing.

By your own admission, the year you spent working on *Lost In The Dream* was an emotionally raw time for you. Has the success of the album made what you went through worth it?

Not really [laughing]. 2013 in retrospect was a time of transition. I was trying to figure out what I was doing in every aspect of my life, trying to figure out what was real, what games I was playing with myself, what I was doing with my life. Making the record, making music as much as I could definitely helped me through all that. I've learned to deal with a lot of the issues I was confronting. When it comes time to do the next record, it might not be as difficult for me, but only because I've learned how to manage a lot of my anxieties and not let things get to a point of ruining me. But it's not like because this record has done so well I think everything from now on is going to be fine.

How awkward was it re-living that year in virtually every interview you did to promote the album?

I didn't have a problem with that. It actually helped put some perspective on things. It was a difficult time for me and people were aware of that. It's not like talking about it brought back bad memories. So I was comfortable when I started doing some press to talk about it. People close to me were saying maybe I shouldn't talk about it so much. But the record is what it is, you know. I'm not ashamed of that, so I was OK with being open about it. Then I also looked at it in the sense that all my favourite songwriters, while they may not always have been so open, they always wrote about what was happening in their lives, which became the narrative of their songs.

I guess I was thinking about *Blood On The Tracks*, not that Dylan would ever come out and give a lot of interviews about his divorce, so that's a bit different. But I was also thinking about *Darkness On The Edge Of Town*, a story about career trauma, and *Tonight's The Night*, a sad record about death and friendship. The list goes on. I felt a certain responsibility, I guess, as a songwriter, to be open about what inspired the record. If I was going to write a record inspired by my personal life, then I figured I owed it to people to be open about it. I didn't feel like I needed to be guarded about it. Obviously, you don't go into detail about everything, but I thought for the most part it was OK for me to be open about where the record came from.

What have been the highlights of the year for you?

Just the way things have grown, generally, the growing excitement wherever we go. It's like the album's happening everywhere and it seems for the right reasons. I can't believe it's travelled liked it has and resonated with so many people. It's also been amazing all over the world, really, to see the changes in the crowds who've come to see us. We've had all



Preparing for battle: The War On Drugs play Club Uncut at the Borderline, London, 2008

SENT TO COVENTRY...

"THAT WAS A FUNNY, STRANGE TOUR"

The War On Drugs' first UK visit

A couple of days after they were due to start a 35-date European tour in September 2008 with The Hold Steady that had been cancelled at the last moment, leaving them stranded in London, The War On Drugs played a sensational Club Uncut show at London's Borderline. Desperate for more work for the band, their label then dispatched them to a Battle Of The Bands contest in Coventry.

"It was an open mic, Battle Of The Bands night at a place in Coventry called The Tin Angel," Granduciel

recalls. "I think we had to play an acoustic or unplugged set. There was us and a singer-songwriter who was probably in her sixties. I don't know if she was a professional singer-songwriter or a schoolteacher or a housewife, or what. But she had a lot of fans there. I think she sang two originals and a Tim Hardin song and she brought the house down and won the competition, hands down. We came second by default. There were only two acts, us and this woman. That was a funny, strange tour and the only time we've played Coventry."

"I DIDN'T WANT TO GET INTO A SPAT WITH SOME UNHAPPY OLD DUDE"
GRANDUCIEL ON KOZELEK

sorts of people coming out, which for a band is great.

So along with a lot of our earlier fans, really intense music fans, it's been cool that we've had people coming to our shows that are more casual concert-goers, people on dates, whatever. If this is the album that gets them out, that's pretty awesome. I think it's really cool that some older people have come out to see us, too [see panel].

Have there been any real downsides to the year?

I guess just the amount of time being away from family and friends. But you expect that. This is what I've always wanted to do, so I'm not complaining. Being away on tour for so long is tough, but we try to stay healthy. We're not in our twenties anymore, so we're not destroying our bodies every night.

One of the more bizarre things that happened this year must have been the public spat with Mark Kozelek? Oh, yeah. There was that.

This all started when you played the Ottawa Folk Festival and evidently drowned out his set from a neighbouring stage. That's right.



Adversary Mark Kozelek, Ottawa Folk Festival, Sept 13, 2014



Kidrocker: the promo film for "Red Eyes", 2014

GLASTO

“AN INCREDIBLE SIGHT...”

Adam on The War On Drugs' 2014 Glastonbury experience

“WE PLAYED AT 12.30 in the afternoon and there was this huge sea of people. There's no other word for it. There was a sea of people, an incredible sight. We were on the Pyramid Stage and we got a great response. I remember during the guitar solo in 'Eyes To The Wind', everybody started cheering. This was at the end of our set, it was the last song and I thought, 'Oh, man. That's never happened before. People are cheering during my guitar solo. Oh, my God. They love my guitar solo.' And my sax player, John, says, 'Actually, man, they're cheering because the sun just came out.' I'm always so lost in the moment when we're playing. I hadn't noticed the clouds parting and the sun shining through. That actually made more sense than people cheering a four-note guitar solo. Either way, it was an incredible experience.”



Granduciel sitting pretty in 2014: “The next record could be about a million different things...”

Did you know he was even playing at the same time?

I knew he was playing the festival and we were actually bummed because we wanted to see him play. Then we found out that if our sets weren't actually overlapping, he was going to be on close to the time we were scheduled to play. That was the last I ever thought about it. I thought, 'That sucks. It would have been cool to see him.' I wished I could have seen him, because I love his record and I was familiar with his career up to that point and Charlie, the drummer in my band, he's like a huge Red House Painters fan, and we listened to *Benji* on our first tour in March. We listened to it a lot in the van when it came out.

And the next thing I know, I read online that this had happened and he'd apparently said some things about my band. So I sent him a Twitter message because I wanted to confirm what had happened. I wasn't trying to make a big thing out of it. I know that sometimes on the internet things get blown out of proportion and I just wanted to find out if it was true, not because I thought it was such a big deal. I was just curious, you know.

Like, “What's going on?”

Because we had a really good time at that festival and then the next day I heard about this thing and was really bummed. I didn't like the idea of there being this thing going on, whatever it was, that I wasn't aware of and it kind of ruined the previous day at the festival, which had been great. So I was just trying to find out what happened.

So you weren't aware of his comments at the time?

No. I didn't find out until someone in my band sent me something they'd seen online. I didn't like the idea of someone talking shit about us at a festival, but I still wasn't sure what he'd said, whether this really even happened. Then it turned out he'd been moaning and complaining about us. The whole thing, honestly, it's been mildly amusing and sometimes hurtful, but you know, people have their opinions and they can say what they like.

Was there a suggestion that you actually play together?

That was his idea. He wanted that. He sent an email through somebody else, through Charlie, my drummer, actually. He said, “Here's what we'll do. They'll invite me to play with them.” This would have been at the Fillmore, in San Francisco, where he lives. At first I thought, ‘This is kind of cool.’ But I didn't write him back straight away. I'm on tour, you know. But I was cool with the idea. Then a couple of days later, I got an email from him that said something like “the offer has expired”. Then he went public with it all and tried to make it seem like I'd backed out of something. I was like, ‘Come on. What're you doing?’ It was just fucking silly. He just wanted to start it up again.

What was your reaction when you heard his song, “War On Drugs: Suck My Cock”?

We'd just played the second of two sold-out shows at the Fillmore, this legendary venue, which was just really cool, and I remember sitting in my tour bus listening to it and

what softened it was the fact we'd just played those two sold-out shows and I was sitting in my tour bus, feeling pretty good about that. But I got really upset at the song because I thought it was just stupid. What really rankled was he played it up like we'd actually met and we've never met. He gave the impression that he'd watched us play. He's probably never even listened to our music.

Do you think he was genuinely pissed about what happened and had a genuine gripe or has he just stirred all this up for publicity?

I remember playing Glasgow recently and there was a DJ doing a huge club night below the venue we were playing and even though we were playing real loud, I could still feel the bass from below and it was really throwing me off because it was very obviously very different to the tempo we were playing. So I can understand the frustration of playing a festival and having a louder band on a stage nearby. But that happens all the time when you have festivals with multiple stages. It's part of the game. Get on with it.

You know, the guy used to be an actor. So maybe he was just like playing this part of someone who was outraged, or whatever. I'm not really interested. But some people, they like fucking with people and putting stuff out there and sitting back and laughing at it and not really caring. I don't see the point. I mean, forget it, dude. Get over yourself.

As a fan, how has all this affected your opinion of him as a songwriter?

I don't know. I mean, it hasn't really changed. I was watching some performance videos the other night, going through some websites, and I watched some stuff of him playing and he's got a cool band. He's got a guitar player who plays a Black Les Paul Custom, which I thought was pretty cool. That's the one I want next. I love his songwriting, so I think, ‘Who cares what he says?’ Then he makes fun of us for covering “Tangled Up In Blue”. And it's like, “Hey, dude, you did a whole fucking album of fucking AC/DC covers. Come on.” And the whole point is, we learned that song in like four minutes. We were in Minneapolis doing a radio session and we were all sitting there in our headphones and all that and I was like, “Hey, ‘Tangled Up In Blue’ was recorded here.” And I

started playing it and in like two minutes we'd worked up a version and that was the first time we ever played it, on that radio show. It's one of my favourite songs and I have such a great band that out of nowhere they came up with this killer version of “Tangled Up In Blue”. That's where I was coming from with that version and he's making fun of it like we're a fucking tribute band. That's the part where I have to go, “Come on, dude. We're all just out here in bands just trying to make it as far as the next gig, you know.”

He seemed to be reluctant to let it go and followed “War On Drugs: Suck My Cock” with another song, “Adam Granofsky Blues”, in which he read out some things you'd said in an interview, punctuated with much cackling laughter.

Yeah, he did that. It was just stupid. You know, our music is what it is and we're still comparatively a pretty young band. I mean, I've made three records. I want to make cool music, too, as I get older. He's been making music for much longer. But it's not my fault he's older than I am. I mean the dude's like 15 years older than me and of course he's made more records. But I just don't get this cut-down-the-other-guy thing he has going. That's not something I'm into. It doesn't have any value for me, whether it's an act or not. I have my fans and I'm grateful for them, whether they're new fans or old fans, casual concert goers or record heads or whatever they are. Everyone's entitled to like who they want to like, cheer who they want to cheer. But he's like, “I don't

tweet, I play shows.” Hey, dude, we played 175 shows this year, fuck you.

You know, this is probably the most I've spoken about all this, because I didn't really want to get into some pointless public spat with some unhappy old dude. And it really is pointless. He has no real point.

There's nothing to defend. It's a non issue.

Finally, then, what are your plans for 2015?

We have January off and I have some studio time booked. We're going to be doing a lot of recording in February. I've been doing a lot of writing. I haven't been doing a lot of recording,

there hasn't been any time. But I record a lot on my phone when we soundcheck and have time to play a new song I've been working on. The band will play along and I'll record that, just loose jams on my phone, and then listen to that over and over. I have a lot of ideas, but who knows what will happen when we get in the studio. That's part of the excitement of making a record. It's like a trip into the unknown. The next record could be about a million different things. ☺

The War On Drugs tour the UK from February 16

DAD-ROCKIN' GOOD

“I NEVER WANTED MY BAND TO PLAY JUST ONE KIND OF MUSIC TO ONE KIND OF MUSIC FAN”

The War On Drugs' trans-generational appeal...

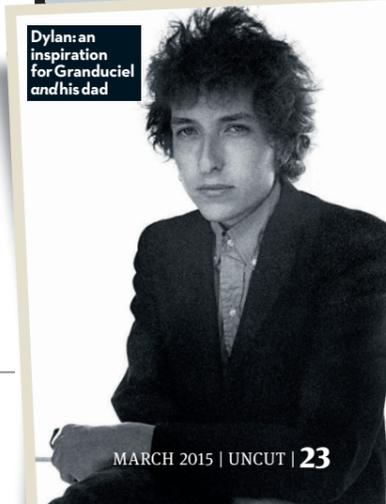
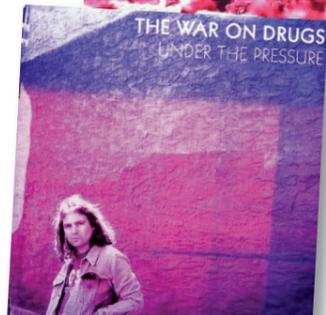
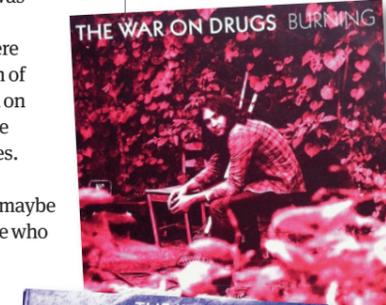
“I'VE HEARD THIS really a lot this year: ‘I turned my dad on to your record and now he loves rock music again.’ That's been so great, you know, to make that kind of connection. It's like my own dad. He's 83 years old and even he loves the record. My dad has never shown any interest in rock music or pop music. He was born in the '30s and he's a fan of, like, Benny Goodman and Harry Belafonte. A couple of weeks ago, he told me he went out and bought *The River* because he'd read it was a record I'd been inspired by. He bought *The River*. He bought *Blonde On Blonde*. And he loves them. I'm like, ‘What???’ It's crazy, but I never wanted my band to play just one kind of music to one kind of music fan. So if people who haven't really invested too much in modern music have heard about us and listened to the album and really liked it, that's just really gratifying. Because a lot of those people grew up with the music I love.”

“SOME GUYS LIKE FUCKING WITH PEOPLE, PUTTING STUFF OUT THERE AND LAUGHING AT IT...”

GRANDUCIEL



“An incredible experience”: The War On Drugs at Glastonbury, June 27, 2014



Dylan: an inspiration for Granduciel and his dad

GARY WOLSTENHOLME/REDFERNS, PIETER VAN HATTEN, JERRY SCHATZBERG