

# HOPE OF THE STATES

WRITTEN BY NEVIN MARTEL PHOTOGRAPHED BY CHARLIE LANGELLA

Hope of the States will never be a normal band with a dull, predictable story. Formed in Chichester, England, less than five years ago, Sam Herlihy (vocals, piano, and guitar), the late Jimmi Lawrence (guitar), Anthony Theaker (guitar, piano, and organ), Mike Siddell (violin), Paul Wilson (bass), and Simon Jones (drums) always wanted to be something special—something epic in proportion and majestic in scope. Informed by Ennio Morricone's soundtracks, Godspeed You Black Emperor's sonic sprawl, the Verve's ambition, world politics, and a revolutionary spirit, they eloquently rage against the dying of the light with a poetic fury and a decaying Babylonian splendor.

"I always wanted to take long instrumentals with big sounds and strange arrangements and shorten them down into little pop songs," a sad-eyed and tousle-haired Herlihy explains, as rain drowns the pavement outside the New York City hotel bar. "We always wanted to be a band with songs. I want to be the Beatles—'Ticket to Ride' that sounds like *Once Upon a Time in the West*. If you can get those two things together, then that's the best thing in the world."

"Without getting into prog territory," interrupts a cheerily hungover Jones. "Prog' being a dirty word," he clarifies.

The sextet took their name from social commentator and journalist Albert Deutsch's scathing essay on the appalling conditions of American mental institutions in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. "But the main reason we picked it is because when we started the band, there were all these 'The' bands—The White Stripes, The Hives and whatnot," Herlihy explains. "And we didn't want a band name that sounded like a band name. To us it sounds like the

name of a sunken ship."

They were signed to Sony in June 2003, on the strength of one single and their blistering live show that combines their cinematic songs with visually arresting projections that mix together images of the military industrial complex, 4<sup>th</sup> of July parades, anti-war commentaries, and a pair of lovesick crabs (yes, lovesick crabs). After no small amount of discussion, they worked with Ken Thomas, the producer known for sculpting Sigur Rós' otherworldly epics.

A trio of studios and almost a year later, the band completed the work for what became *The Lost Riots*. To celebrate, they went out for a congratulatory drink, leaving guitarist Jimmi Lawrence behind to finish pattering around. When they returned, Lawrence had killed himself. All their recent feelings of victory and jubilation were brutally washed away in one horrendous instant. When they talk about Lawrence's death, the rawness of their wounds is palpable.

"We'll always miss him. He was our best friend and we wish he was here," Herlihy says, refusing to make eye contact. "His death made everyone realize how important the band is to us. We're still here and he's not, but we know that he'd be really proud of us."

Listening to the album now, there are a million moments when you feel like they're singing about Lawrence's passing, though the lyrics were written long before he died. Regardless, *The Lost Riots* remains as a consolation for the band he left behind, an indestructible monument to their time together, and the first chapter in Hope of the States' Homeric odyssey.

