

# Hot as Lava, Cool as Ice

New York's Avan Lava on recording their first release, *Vapors*

By James Harry Ewert Jr. || photos by Tedd Boggs

**D**uring the spring months of 2010, the offices of a few choice music publications and media outlets received a sleek wooden rectangle in the exact dimensions of a compact disc jewel case—except there was no CD, just a piece of wood with instructions on how to download *Vapors*, the debut EP of Brooklyn-based electro-pop duo Avan Lava. Just as the wooden rectangle could be mistaken for a professionally distributed CD like those found on the shelves of record stores, the sound of Avan Lava's debut record *Vapors* could be confused for the tight sound of a well-rehearsed and established band about to hit its stride. That, of course, is because the pair that made the music and distributed the sharp press packages are no rookies to the music business. Though the band has had as many as a dozen people on stage performing with them, Avan Lava is fundamentally made up of singer, Tom Hennes, and music maker, Le Chev, who also moonlights as the bassist for Fisherspooner.

Answering some questions via e-mail, Evanston, Illinois native, Le Chev, said Avan Lava's wooden rectangle non-CDs are just a glimpse of what he thinks will be stocked in the record stores of the future.

"Anyone who buys a CD is, in my opinion, a collector, and they want something physical to put on their shelf; because they're just gonna listen to it off their computer anyway," Le Chev wrote to Jettison. "The [compact disc] is becoming dated, and I think future record stores are going to look like toy stores, with random fun objects that have download codes. Our wooden CD was a step towards this, something that is unique, but can also fit on the CD shelf."



**Jettison: First off, let's get something straight, how is "Avan Lava" pronounced?**

**Le Chev:** Two words. Avan = Avon (Barksdale), Lava (like from a volcano).

**Jettison: What is Avan Lava all about?**

**LC:** I have to make music. That might sound cliché, but it's the only thing that makes me happy. Whenever I'm away from my instruments I feel completely lost and sad. Our music is about people adopting babies, snakes shedding their skin, and money being wasted. It's about a single beam of light and a dark cave. Music is unique in that, even if someone doesn't get it, they can still like it. Who cares what we think it's about. We just build the house and you live in it.

**Jettison: Jettison is a Chicago-centric publication, what's Avan Lava's Chicago connection?**

**LC:** I grew up in Evanston, so Chicago feels like home, which is why I love and hate it. It feels stale and yet classic. People aren't flakes there, which is nice.

**Jettison: Word on the street is that your debut EP "Vapors" was recorded with borrowed instruments and equipment; have you since procured your own?**

**LC:** I didn't even have a computer when we did *Vapors*; all I had was a bass guitar. I was using three different friends' machines, so I had to be really careful with managing the sessions. Now, I finally have a keyboard and a guitar and computer! It is so much easier to not be doing favors for everyone all the time. Too much time walking dogs!

**Jettison: As far as self-released debut records**

**go, Vapors sounded extremely well-developed and meticulously produced, how long did it take to put together?**

**LC:** It took forever. I know music theory and can play, but at the time I had no idea what I was doing with recording, so I had a massive learning curve to engineer and produce the record. We knew what we were going for as far as a sound and feel, and deciding that is the real challenge. The rest is just technical and patience and experimenting until you feel something. I think it came out great.

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**Jettison: Without a label providing financial and managerial support, how do you and Tom make ends meet? Do you prefer to handle all your press and booking yourself?**

**LC:** We steal Russian secrets and sell them to the Chinese. Tom and I actually get by with music jobs. He sings for shows and other people and I do random production and engineering. Also, I make a little dough touring with Fischerspooner as either their DJ or bass player, which is so fun... We've talked to a few labels who are interested,

but we're not desperate to sign anything. We have all the tools to make a record, so we don't need much out of a label. We just need someone with a little cash so we can work and a good reputation so people open their emails. We're recording a bunch now, and then we'll meet with more people to see who wants to put it out. [As for press] Yeah, we do everything now. It's not a huge deal, although, as we grow we'll have someone else handle it. If you're a music fan, you know the big outlets and publications already, so you just spend a few days writing to them and if they like it, they'll write about it.

**Jettison: On some of Avan Lava's live videos there appears to be what look like back-up singers or dancers, is that usual for a live show?**

**LC:** Haha! Yea, that's Drew Citron and Jo Lampert, they sing backups, dance, and sometimes play keyboards. We try to do choreography like The Time. People will do whatever you're doing on stage; really, you're leading everyone in the crowd. So, them being there and dancing shows everyone that it's okay to have fun—just like Mabry and Edna Holt in *"Stop Making Sense"*.

**Jettison: Like it or not, every band has to have other bands they are pigeonholed with to compare to. I thought I'd give you the opportunity to pick the band(s) that you would like Avan Lava to be compared to? And just out of curiosity, what band, if any, would you not want mentioned in the same sentence as Avan Lava?**

**LC:** Same sentence = Tom Tom Club, Prince, Sigur Ros. Someone compared us to Passion Pit and that pissed me off even though I like them, we don't wanna get lumped in there. Actually I'm doing a remix for them right now.





**Jettison:** What has hurt [should've said influenced] the music industry more, file sharing or MySpace?

**LC:** Neither has hurt the industry. If it's an easy way for people to hear or get music, then it's not

hurting. I rarely buy music, and why would I? It's free. Sure, MySpace is awful now, but when it started it was great, and I still look up bands on it sometimes. (I hope Muxtape.com takes off so I can finally get off MySpace). The great thing about free music is that instead of listening to one record,

you get 10! It let's everyone go deeper into genres, or eras, and feel fine about taking risks with their listening. Now anyone can be a huge music fan and have a massive collection to blab about. ▀