



James Pants

Stones Throw's newest one-man band contorts himself, Spokane-style.

Future Shock-era Herbie Hancock, L.A. electro, New Age-y French disco, and Paradise Garage love-funkists Skyy may inform the tracks on *Welcome*, the debut LP by James Pants, but while the record borrows from these and other roller-rink-friendly '80s grooves, it's no jukebox-style revue. Instead, the wildly divergent but coherent LP tells the tale of a lone music obsessive from the very un-funky town of Spokane, Washington.

"I have a bunch of thrift-store gear, and I like to turn on some red lights and just make some sounds," says the 25-year-old Pants—a.k.a. James Singleton—when pressed to describe his growing oeuvre. "I guess it's just the sound of really cheap equipment, listening to a lot of records, and goofing off."

Tracks like the '80s-electro-indebted "Cosmic Rapp" and his cover of Skyy's '82 single "Let's Celebrate" are derived from very specific reference points, but, in Pants' hands, they take on identities all their own.

"I get so excited about certain records that I basically live vicariously through them and I'll try to record

a song just like that," says Pants, who plays keys, drums, and guitar and sings on most of *Welcome's* tracks. "But because I don't have the musical ability or the right sound, [I] kinda end up with [my] own thing."

Pants credits Spokane—a sprawling but sleepy city of 200,000 in eastern Washington—for his unique window on a musical epoch he's not old enough to remember. "Being kind of an impoverished town, there's always great stuff turning up in thrift stores and pawn shops here," he says, citing the circa '83 Roland JX-3P synthesizer featured on *Welcome*. Another key score was *The Chocolate Star EP*, a rare 1982 release by eccentric Camden, NJ groove-master Gary Davis (a.k.a. "The Professor"), who makes a cameo appearance on *Welcome*. "I like to buy really regional-looking records and I just happened to buy that one—I knew nothing about *Chocolate Star* [which has since been reissued through Boston's Traffic Entertainment], but it blew my mind. I switched my game up."

While Pants take on '80s boogie—also influenced by no-waver James Chance, from whom he aped the

name—is generally less accessible and more offbeat than that of similarly minded Stones Throw recruit Dam-Funk, a handful of tracks like "KA\$H" (released last year as a limited-edition 12-inch) and "Crystal Lite" are definite dancefloor detonators. The former, a collaboration with Austin, TX vocalist Deon Davis (who also sings on "Crystal Lite"), highlights another key ingredient in the James Pants equation: humor. The hilariously offbeat *Monty Python-meets-East L.A.* video for "Do a Couple of Things" (from Stones Throw's *Chrome Children* compilation) makes an ideal introduction to Pants' off-kilter world.

"I take this music seriously but humor is the way I like to get ideas across," Pants says. "Because who's going to take some white kid from Spokane doing '80s boogie seriously?"

Welcome is out this spring on Stones Throw.
www.stonesthrow.com/jamespants