



Two's company: Luke Steele (left) of the Sleepy Jackson and Nick Littlemore of Pnau

# Dawn of a new Empire

A chance meeting, two enigmatic minds and visions of grandeur . . . and now an exciting new album, writes **Sally Browne**

THERE aren't many who could say they're on the same wavelength as singer-songwriter Luke Steele of the Sleepy Jackson.

In print, his name is often accompanied by the word "enigmatic" and he is known for his grand visions and sometimes-difficult band relations.

In Nick Littlemore, one half of dance-pop act Pnau, he finds a like mind. Both have the same approach to music-making — from the importance of a good meal to the influence of divine inspiration — and *Empire of the Sun* is the result of their combined vision.

And what a vision it is. Along with an album (released yesterday) and a lead single (filmed in Shanghai) — both of which are titled *Walking on a*

*Dream* — the pair plan to release a film and record several more video clips around the world, from Mexico to Iceland to Las Vegas.

The chemistry began when Steele, who has also worked with Daniel Johns and Yoko Ono, and Littlemore, who is in London working with The Killers, met in Darlinghurst, Sydney, and had a few beers," says Littlemore.

"I remember Luke cutting quite a striking frame, carrying a suitcase at that time. I wasn't sure exactly what was in it."

Says Steele: "That was my Tom Waits phase, I think. Did I have a pork pie hat on?"

"I think you did. Every time I saw Luke from then on, he would have

the suitcase, but he'd have a different object inside of it, which was thrilling. The next day we went straight up to my folks' place where I had a studio and wrote a song."

Steele remembers Littlemore as being a "bit of a smartarse", but one, it proved, with potential.

"As an artist you look for a connection and there really isn't that many musicians that you have a lightning connection with," Steele says.

"It's quite rare. It's amazing; a lot of musos don't really see eye-to-eye, so it was kind of one in a million for us to meet, and strike."

Over the years, he says, the pair have been like chefs, honing their different dishes at different parties around the world. Steele released two albums with the Sleepy Jackson (*Lovers* in 2003 and *Personality* in 2006) and Littlemore three with Pnau (*Sambanova* in 1999, *Again* in 2003 and *Pnau* last year).

"Now we're starting a restaurant and we're both doing different things that make this restaurant out of this world," Steele continues.

"Certain nights we'll cook and try different wines and different guests will come in. It's like infusing the different ingredients together that complement each other to create an apostolic connection of a higher calling."

More prosaically, they admit that food is a big motivator for both of them. "We'd have to have a fantastic meal generally before we go into the studio," Littlemore says.

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The band aren't joking about that higher calling, and the record has an epic scope.

Indeed, there is one song on the album called *The World*, for which Littlemore wrote the lyrics.

"A lot of this record is looking back at the world, as though we removed ourselves from where we were on the street, in the country, and the land on Earth," he says.

"We were out in the galaxy looking back at the world. We just wanted to talk about much more prophetic things than just cars and girls."

"There's one word that Luke uses through the whole record, which is surrender, and we really wanted to surrender to the higher calling, to the project as being the motivator.

"We wanted to put something back into the world that people could really believe in and we will not let them down on any level."

*Walking on a Dream* is out now.