

Antarctic Monkeys: (from left) Ian Fletcher, Dean Reynolds, Darren Clark, John Paul Davies. Below: the real thing.



'I'd be happy being an Antarctic Monkey for ever.'  
JOHN PAUL DAVIES



## ANTARCTIC MONKEYS

Bet they look good on the dancefloor.

**N**ovember 2006. Half an hour after finishing their set to an indifferent crowd at Cleethorpes' Winter Gardens, unsigned Wolverhampton indie band The Empires are back onstage in the same venue. Only this time, they're pretending to be another band entirely: the Arctic Monkeys. As they launch into Fake Tales Of San Francisco, the crowd goes ballistic. It's the sort of reaction they could only dream of in their "real" incarnation as The Empires.

"Nobody goes to see unsigned bands any more, so we're doing this tribute band to get exposure and to get gigs," says drummer Darren Clark, of their Trojan Horse strategy.

Back in March 2006, The Empires, then called The Ryde, were struggling to get even local pub bookings. During one disillusioned rehearsal, they began idly jamming I Bet You Look Good On The Dancefloor, from the Arctic Monkeys' recently-released debut album. "We said, as a joke, Wouldn't it be funny if we did an Arctic Monkeys tribute band?" says singer/guitarist Dean Reynolds.

"Next thing we know, our manager says, You're doing it, and booked a gig. We learned the album in two weeks and that was that."

**A**ntarctic Monkeys are a triumph of opportunism: a joke that, one year on, has become a phenomenon. Their popularity has opened the floodgates for similar indie tributes, from Johnny Borrell clones Razorlike to The Kaiser Killers who mix Kaiser Chiefs with The Killers.

This particular Friday, the Antarctic Monkeys are at The Scala in London's King Cross, where they're headlining gay indie club night Popstarz. They say that normally theirs is a "straighter" crowd, especially in the North East where gigs are regular. "We're playing the places the real Arctic Monkeys don't play any more," says Reynolds.

Antarctic Monkeys are a poor visual facsimile of the real thing: the 27-year-old Reynolds, for one, is taller and bulkier than Alex Turner. Bassist John Paul Davies – who tried to join the Arctic Monkeys when

their original bassist Andy Nicholson left in June 2006 –

suggests their aim isn't to provide a carbon copy, merely to play Arctic Monkeys material "with the same energy".

Still, theirs is a unique predicament: forever playing catch-up with the original article. Favourite Worst Nightmare went on sale the week of their Popstarz gig, but day-job commitments mean they haven't had time to learn any of it. Reynolds and Davies work in a building society, guitarist Ian Fletcher is a college teacher, and Clark works in a toy shop. And while they believe their gameplan is a winner, it's the Antarctic Monkeys who've been booked up until Christmas, not The Empires.

"In five years, we'll be headlining London as The Empires," says Davies. "But if that doesn't happen, then fair enough. I'd be happy being an Antarctic Monkey forever."

**Info:** [www.antarcticmonkeys.com](http://www.antarcticmonkeys.com)