

As Tall As Lions

SUBURBAN ROAR



PHOTOGRAPH BY HYPOZENTRUM.COM
(L-R) DANIEL NIGRO, CLIFF SARÇONA, JULIO TAVAREZ, SEAN FITZGERALD

By Tom Semioli

Will *As Tall As Lions* emerge as kings of the rock 'n' roll jungle? If not, it won't be from a lack of confidence.

"Hell no, Long Island bands definitely do not have an inferiority complex to New York City bands," declares singer/guitarist Daniel Nigro from his home on the largest island in the continental United States. "A lot of musicians on the Island are becoming more and more successful on a national level," explains Nigro. "Taking Back Sunday and Brand New alone are two of the premier touring artists in the country."

Though Manhattan garners the lion's share of the credit for nurturing many of rock's most storied musical artists, it's the sweeping suburban townships of Long Island that have been a fertile breeding ground for many influential legends, such as Lou Reed (Freeport), Billy Joel (Hicksville), Johnny Ramone (Franklin Square), Public Enemy's Chuck D (Roosevelt), Joan Jett (Long Beach), Twisted Sister's Dee Snider (Baldwin), and Brian Setzer of Stray Cats fame (Massapequa).

Nigro, guitarist Sean Fitzgerald, and drummer Cliff Sarcona have been working together for nine years, stretching back to their high-school days of jamming in their parents' spare rooms and garages, honing their craft at the now defunct Downtown club in Farmingdale. Bassist and multi-instrumentalist Julio Tavarez joined the fray two years ago, replacing original member Brian Caesar. The band's 2002 debut EP *Blood and Aphorisms* won acclaim in underground

performance.


"I think a lot of bands rely on digital tricks in the studio," says Nigro. "We tried to stay away from all those things. You can hear many new records with devices on the drums especially. But sometimes that comes off as too mechanical and unnatural." Further discussion uncovered the fact that the Lions did indeed use a computer drum gadget on one track. "Yes. Well, we did want to sound like a machine on that one cut," he laughs.

The seven month recording process that became the album *As Tall As Lions* was not without drama. The individual members endured the somewhat normal artistic phases of self-doubt and over-indulgence which prevented them from touring and road-testing the new material. "We went through stages," confesses Nigro. "The first month went extremely well, but we soon fell into a slump and did not write for an entire month and a half. All of us were coming to rehearsal with high hopes and leaving unsatisfied. Then the complete opposite occurred. We'd have a burst of creativity, writing four songs a week. After that, we'd grind to a complete stop again. Then, out of nowhere we'd knock out five songs in two weeks. It was like riding a rollercoaster."

Helmed by Michael Watts, an engineer who had recorded several of the band's demos, and Steve Haigler, *As Tall As Lions* fuses the group's past, present and future. "Michael has a great ear for harmony and song structure. Steve mixed all the Pixies records, in addition to working with Throwing Muses, Blake Babies, Fuel, Bran Van 3000, Marshal Crenshaw, and Quicksand. It was a match of comfort with Mike and challenging ourselves with someone like Steve who we knew could take us to the next level."

"We set it up so that the songs actually float into each other." Nigro emphasizes "'The Ghosts of York' sort of blends into 'Milk and Honey.' As the beat ends for 'Song for Luna' the very next beat begins the next track. When we planned the record we knew we'd need a strong

opening song like 'Stab City.' One of the big discussions we had happened half-way through the making of this record when about five or six songs were completed. We felt that if we continued the way we were going the record would have been too slow. So we wrote 'York' and other songs specifically slated to be album tracks. Our goal was to make this record a complete listening experience and also something that you could enjoy on a song by song basis. I'd say we've achieved that."

By the time you read this, the Long Island Music Hall of Fame will have held its inaugural ceremonies feting some of the aforementioned suburban icons along with such locals as the members of Kiss, new wave pop diva Cyndi Lauper, and jazz giant John Coltrane, among many others. "We have a great history of music here from many different genres, not just rock," says Nigro. "I don't think the world, and certainly not New York City, is aware of that. Plus the Long Island scene is always lively despite the fact that there is no main venue or town to play. There's lots of tough competition to pull in the kids." 

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circles as did their reputation for energetic concert performances. Named after a line from a poem Fitzgerald had written four years ago, the new Lions' collection displays a distinct growth from their previous recordings.

"Our first record (*Lafcadio* 2004) was not much of a collaborative effort," recalls Nigro. "It's fair to say on that one I wrote most of the initial chord progressions, lyrics and melodies. For this record we realized that four brains are better than my one brain. Now, no member is the be-all and end-all, which is important when it comes to keeping a band together. There's more emotion in these new songs because of the creative energy," he explains, "and all of us are capable of coming up with great material."

Inspired by contemporary British rock and American indie, *As Tall As Lions*' latest release evokes aural images of what might have happened to Radiohead had they not took an artistic left turn on *Kid A*. The band employs dreamy melodies and quasi-orchestral leanings with the grit of a live