



BY SHALLON LESTER

With this new album, As Tall As Lions has had some lineup changes. Is it true that one of your guitarists left because he hated touring?

Before Julio [Tavares], our original bass player was Brian Caesar and yes, he left the band. He was older than us and quit a full-time job to play with ATAL. He realized that touring was not what it was made out to be—especially if you're not on a major label with any kind of tour support. You're either sharing a hotel room or you're sleeping on somebody's floor and the only thing you can afford is McDonald's or Taco Bell for lunch, breakfast and dinner. It starts to make you crazy.

What are the harsh realities of touring?

We have a small van that seats six people and we have all of our clothes and everything that we live on for two months straight in the van with us. It gets pretty terrible sometimes. We're not the poorest of the poor, but when we first started touring, there were times we slept in the van. I remember one night we were stuck at a gas station in the middle of Oklahoma and there was no room to sleep in the van so our tour manager took his pillow and slept outside on the cement. So when you're 27 years old and used to a nice apartment in Queens like Brian was, it's easy to see why you can't take it anymore. At one point or another, we were all ready to give it up.

Now you can afford hotel rooms?

Yeah, now we can finally afford hotel rooms—after two years of touring.

Is it because you're on a bigger label and they gave you more money?

No, it's just a matter of building up as a band. Money works like this: The more people at your show, the more merchandise you sell and that's how you afford to sleep in a hotel room. But even during the Sparta tour—one of the biggest tours we've done—there were nights when there were only 100 people there, then there were nights when a few thousand people would show up. It varies every show.

Your next tour is with Cute Is What We Aim For and Circa Survive. Those bands are very different from each other and from your sound.

We're very different than Circa Survive and Cute Is What We Aim For, but music is music. I don't think we've ever really toured with a band that people would regard us as "fitting" with.

People say your record is a good make-out album. Is that something you were aiming for?

Yeah, it was. A lot of people say they have sex to our record. When we first started work on the album we did the first three demos to see what we liked or didn't like about them. We played them for a few friends and our friends we're like, "Dude, I could totally fuck to this song!" We thought that was awesome. Julio and I got together to work on the vocal melodies and we talked about how we wanted it to be sexy. We kept the sex appeal in mind while writing the rest of the album.

People compare your sound to Coldplay, who—lets be honest—aren't the manliest of men. Do you appreciate those comparisons?

Five years ago, if someone made that comparison, it would be cool. But now, if someone says we sound like them it's like, "Ugh. You sound like Coldplay, like bed-wetter music." Everybody in the band was a huge Coldplay fan up until the latest record. In my opinion, they buckled under the pressure of thinking they had to write the greatest record ever made. They fell very short of that but I definitely think they helped put real music back on the radio—they have a lot of sincere songs and radio today lacks that sincerity. A lot of music listeners who were into Britney Spears started listening to Coldplay.

How would you like people to describe your sound?

I hate it when people say, "ambient indie rock!" What the hell is that? Genres don't mean anything anymore. I guess you could compare us to Coldplay—a younger and non-gay Coldplay.

You're from Long Island—are the women out there as high maintenance as legend has it?

The girls in Long Island are terrible. They all drive nice cars, have fake tans and are either really in shape or really out of shape but still think they're hot shit. They're just too full of themselves. I haven't dated a Long Island girl in three years. Sometimes I go to the bar and hang out with a Long Island girl just for the fun of it and laugh the whole time at how ridiculous her accent is. Ninety-six percent of Long Island girls are just awful, awful people.

So do you have to commute into Manhattan to date girls?

The girls in the city tend to be a little more mature. Long Island is not the place to go to find a good, wholesome girl.

ATAL's third album, *As Tall As Lions*, is out now.

MUSIC INTERVIEWS HIGHLIGHT

AS TALL AS LIONS

THE MELLOW ROCKERS DISCUSS TOURING AND THE WUSSIFICATION OF COLDPLAY



Haven't heard New York's newest indie kings? Think of them as the new Coldplay—only with balls. Lead singer Daniel Nigro opens up about changing bass players, sleeping in gas stations and making sex music.

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As Tall As Lions CD – Triple Crown / East/West

If you based your opinion of As Tall As Lions on their instrumentals alone, you could make a case for their inclusion in the mokey Britpop picture alongside such groups as Electric Soft Parade, Elbow, and perhaps even Badly Drawn Boy or Coldplay. These guys are based in New York, mind you... and it doesn't matter a wit. The vocals ooze English like crumpets omit steam when they're baked just right, and their velocity defines whether the songs of this self-titled record work or fragment into nothing. They often don't hold up. The desultory first half of "Be Here Now" doesn't help either. It is one of the few instances where the backing band doesn't fulfill its duties, but halfway through the song a major shift takes place, whitewashing the entire landscape clean with a soft breakdown that showcases the brighter side of the vocalist Daniel Nigro's abilities. A boom-kapow "Bungalow Bill" group chorus to close-up shop only

seals the deal. The next track sucks balls, but "Maria h" jingles chimes in your face and sprinkles dust in your eyes; you won't be able to resist. Is it all just a tease? Is the drop-off after album-opener "Stab City" really that cavernous? No. It's not insurmountable. As Tall As Lions don't have enough juice to play king of the mountain just yet. Don't rule them out, either, don't you dare. (Grant Purdum)

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