



AS TALL AS LIONS

Indie rock band blends classic, contemporary musical influences

BY RON WYNN
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Long Island indie rockers As Tall As Lions feel Sunday night's appearance at the Exit/In, which pairs them with the Nashville ensemble Cassino along with the California band The Snake, The Crown, The Cross, will be the best of the three visits they've made over the past few months to Music City.

Part of that comes from the confidence they've gained as their self-titled release on Triple Crown/East West has consistently received favorable critical notices and also due to their participation in *Alternative Press Magazine's* first "Bands You Need To Know Tour" that matched them with such groups as Envy On the Coast, Circa Survive and Cute.

"The first time we came to Nashville there were no fans there, and while we enjoyed the show, it was kind of tough," lead vocalist/guitarist Daniel Nigro said. "Then the second time we had a few more people and the response

What: Long Island rockers As Tall As Lions along with Cassino and The Snake, The Crown, The Cross
When: 8 p.m. Sunday
Where: The Exit/In, 2208 Elliston Place
Cost: \$10 advance, \$12 day of the show
Info: 321-3340

was a lot better. Now that we've had the disc out for a while and have gotten some good response from the single and video, we're really expecting some great things. Plus we've heard a lot about the Exit/In, and the crowds that come out for the shows, so we're really looking forward to this concert."

The debut video for "Love Love Love (Love Love)," which was directed by Adam Neustadter of

Ghost Robot Films has gotten widespread online exposure, while this song and another single "Milk and Honey" are getting respectable airplay on both satellite and Internet radio as well as on college and indie radio outlets.

Like the other material on *As Tall As Lions* it features aggressive, animated vocals from Nigro, equally fierce and complimentary guitar work by Saen Fitzgerald and sharp, thoughtful and spirited rhythmic support by the tandem of bassist Julio Tavarez and drummer Cliff Sarcona.

Nigro cites Tavarez, who became their regu-

lar bassist about three years ago, as being the ingredient that helped solidify things musically.

"We had another bassist who was a good player, but he didn't have the technique Julio's brought to the band," Nigro said. "We've maintained a sound since he came that's both effective and collaborative, and now we have the right balance in terms of our songwriting and live performance."

One thing that's surprising about As Tall As Lions' tunes is the blend of references and the continual shifting between contemporary and classic elements. At various points in songs like "Ghosts of York" a prominent '70s influence comes across in both Nigro's vocals and the song arrangement. At other times, everything from a slicing '80s beat to a faster-paced sensibility and more intricate approach gets presented, offering listeners almost a quick crash course in modern rock arranging and writing.

"We've been careful to listen to everything from the Beatles and Neil Young to the Smiths and even Latin music," Nigro said. "We don't

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Up-and-coming band builds national following

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feel there should be any barriers about what we can try as a rock band. We neither try to make everything intricate nor avoid doing something simple and catchy if it works. A lot of times someone will bring in a short melody or a piano part and then everyone will expand on it, put in their own licks and we'll have a song. We love alternating between something very complex and then switching over and just having fun with a basic riff."

But they are also studious and careful in their music, something reflected in the fact that they spent six months

perfecting the songs for *As Tall As Lions*, not wanting to lose any of the momentum they'd gained from their debut work *Lafcadio*, though Nigro admits that in retrospect they were still feeling their way around as a band.

"We had been playing around Long Island and doing some shows, but we didn't have any set rules or tendencies when we did *Lafcadio*," he said. "That was good because we were willing to take chances and strive for an original, fresh sound. But the problem was that we didn't know very much about the business and we kind of learned some things the hard way the first time out."

Now a seasoned, experienced unit steadily building a national following, Nigro says there's one thing that's changed over the last few years, and it's been a major surprise.

"When we first began playing together there was absolutely no interest in us in terms of playing New York City, but we were kind of heroes in our hometown," Nigro said. "Now the last few times we're getting big crowds and playing places in New York that we'd never thought were interested, and our hometown fans are acting rather laid-back. That's something we never expected, but it's kind of interesting." □