

STREET SCENE

Judah Johnson strikes a new sound



STEPHANIE A. CASOLA

Rings of smoke swirl around and the setting sun shines at eye-level through the window of the bar where I've agreed to meet Judah Johnson.

Despite its Detroit-based post rock band actually goes by that name for the band, the name itself is meaningless, and without boundaries.

But it sounds like someone you might know.

Together since last spring, Judah Johnson has gotten off to a strong start — performing at some enviable venues like the Magic Bag in Ferndale and Detroit's Magic Stick, with some local darlings, The Atomic Numbers, and national up-starts, The Push Stars.

Don't deem Judah a pop band, though its distinctive sound meshes well in a setting. Vocalist Daniel Johnson, keyboardist Nate Cavalieri, drummer Charlie Koltak, guitarist Brian Pierson and bassist Zach Roberts defy classification.

If you haven't heard Judah Johnson, you haven't heard anything like this.

Moving Midwest

The band's Midwest roots stretch rather far. Roberts and Koltak grew up together in Midland, Mich. They met Cavalieri while attending Central Michigan University. Pierson grew up in Missouri and met Johnson while attending college there. The first spark of this line up, though, came when Koltak and Johnson met during an open mic night at Hamtramck's Holbrook Cafe. They began working on songs together with Roberts, which soon led to recording a demo with producer Don Dixon (C.M.U. The Smithereens). Slowly linking these associations, Judah Johnson grew from a trio to a

five-piece.

"In some ways it's easier," said Daniel Johnson. "When you're a three-piece, it's kind of spare. When you have more musicians, you can do a lot more."

While songs often originate with him, each member puts his own mark on them, a certain spin or style. There exists an equality in the band. Pierson said it's no reason he's happy to be part of Judah Johnson. "I don't think anyone is afraid to bring up a new idea," he said.

From Tom Waits to the super-speed boats of Autotech, the bands influences vary greatly. There's no telling what this group might be into next — or what direction their own music might take. "This is like the ideal band for me," said Pierson. "When you see what your friends are passionate about, what they get excited about, that's the best part about music."



Loud and clear: (Left to right) Charlie Koltak, Brian Pierson, Zach Roberts, Nate Cavalieri and Daniel Johnson are Judah Johnson. Celebrate the release of their self-titled debut (and Nate Cavalieri's birthday) this Sunday, June 17, at the Magic Stick in Detroit.

he said, reflect "things we've all been going through."

The EP was recorded digitally from August to January. "We just did it as naturally as we could," said Pierson. It was mastered at Rustbelt Studio, where producers Al Sutton and Bob Ebeling praised the outcome. "It was really flattering," said Cavalieri.

The record is one of the first to be released on Chicago's Flameshovel Records label. Jesse Woghin has been a longtime friend of the band and also completed the record's artwork. "He had some idea of what we were trying to do," said Cavalieri. "We're not talking about getting rich."

Woghin said he and Flameshovel cohort Nash Static are proud to work with the band. "In a lot of ways you could say that Judah Johnson is the reason that Flameshovel exists right now," he said in an e-mail interview. "I had been thinking idly of starting a label for a while, mostly as a pastime, something to break up the

monotony of the 9-5. Yet, when I realized that I had the opportunity to release music that I really loved and believed in by a group of some of my best friends, that pretty much jumpstarted the genesis of the label. Within a few weeks of getting the Judah Johnson record, Nash jumped on board and we were in high gear."

Judah Johnson is good music for music's sake. It delves into a dark, dreamy place, one that feels at once familiar and brand-new. At a time when pop music is barraged by well-designed pop bands you can barely tell apart, here is a glimmer of hope and originality on our side.

Judah Johnson celebrates the release of their self-titled E.P. on Flameshovel Records, along with performances by The Climax Divine, Document, Sunday, June 17, Magic Stick, Detroit. Call (313) 633-9700.

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GUIDE TO THE MOVIES

National Amusements Showcase Cinemas	Showcase Westland 14	United Artists Theatres	THE MUMMY RETURNS (PG-13)	DOWN TO EARTH (PG-13)
Showcase Aurora Hills 14 2150 N. Orchard Rd. Between University & Walton Blvd. 248-375-2660 Bargain Matinee Daily All Shows until 6 pm Continuous Show Daily Late Show Wed. Thurs. Fri. Sat. NP DENOTES NO PASS	6500 Wayne Rd. One block S. of Warren Rd. 313-729-1060 Bargain Matinee Daily All Shows until 6 pm Continuous Show Daily Late Show Wed. Thurs. Fri. Sat. NP DENOTES NO PASS	West 14th 914 E. 2nd St. 248-788-6372 Evolution (PG-13) NY SWAMPSON (PG-13) NY MOLLY RINGWALD (PG-13) NY WHAT'S THE WORST THAT COULD HAPPEN (PG-13) NY THE MUMMY RETURNS (PG-13) NY PEARL HARBOR (PG-13) NY CALL FOR COMPLETE LISTINGS AND TIMES	1111 East Main Royal Oak 248-342-4100 Call 770-800 for 842 (DISCOUNTED SHOWS) TICKETS AVAILABLE AT THE BOX OFFICE OR PHONE 248-542-0180 VISA AND MASTERCARD ACCEPTED MOLLY RINGWALD (PG-13) NY SWAMPSON (PG-13) NY MOLLY RINGWALD (PG-13) NY CALL FOR COMPLETE LISTINGS AND TIMES Children Under 6 Not Admitted	1515 East Main Farmington Hills 248-342-4100 Call 770-800 for 842 (DISCOUNTED SHOWS) TICKETS AVAILABLE AT THE BOX OFFICE OR PHONE 248-542-0180 VISA AND MASTERCARD ACCEPTED MOLLY RINGWALD (PG-13) NY SWAMPSON (PG-13) NY MOLLY RINGWALD (PG-13) NY CALL FOR COMPLETE LISTINGS AND TIMES Children Under 6 Not Admitted
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