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Smith Westerns get energy boost

BY RICHARD GIRALDI February 27, 2011 6:28PM



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If Chicago's Smith Westerns were a band on the cusp the last time they played their hometown, they're now a band with something to prove.

At their show last November, the band lacked energy and enthusiasm, which are traits that should come standard with any band that plays dirty glam and garage rock. Yet in the four months since, Smith Westerns have broken through from the indie music blogosphere to the pages of Spin and Rolling Stone, both of which lauded their latest record, "Dye It Blonde." And instead of relishing the fame and exposure, Smith Westerns seem to be taking it head on.

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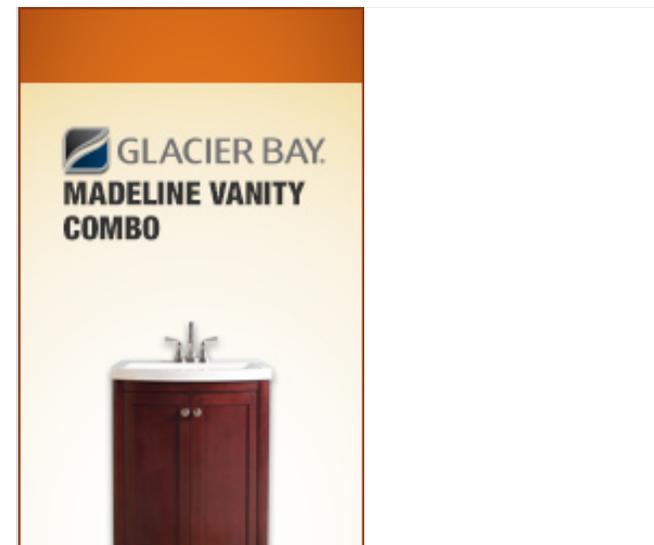
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On Saturday night at a sold-out Empty Bottle, Smith Westerns performed like the mischievous adolescents portrayed in their "Weekend" music video. Their bodies moved to the music, smiles graced all their faces and lead singer and guitarist Cullen Omori addressed the crowd between nearly every song.

In addition to an energy boost, the band has added multi-instrumentalist Ziyad Asrar on keyboard and guitar. The result gives their "Dye It Blonde" songs a much-needed extra melodic layer. The Lynyrd Skynyrd-esque organ line that opens "All Die Young" gives it a spooky funeral march quality, and the grand piano sweeps on "Smile" become the song's backbone.

Smith Westerns also seemed to feed off the frenzied audience. When the band launched into "Weekend" near the end of the set, the crowd at the front of the stage not only broke into dance but also sang aloud the song's chorus of "Na Na Na Na Na, a girl like you."

Before the band's final song of the evening, Omori leaned into the microphone and



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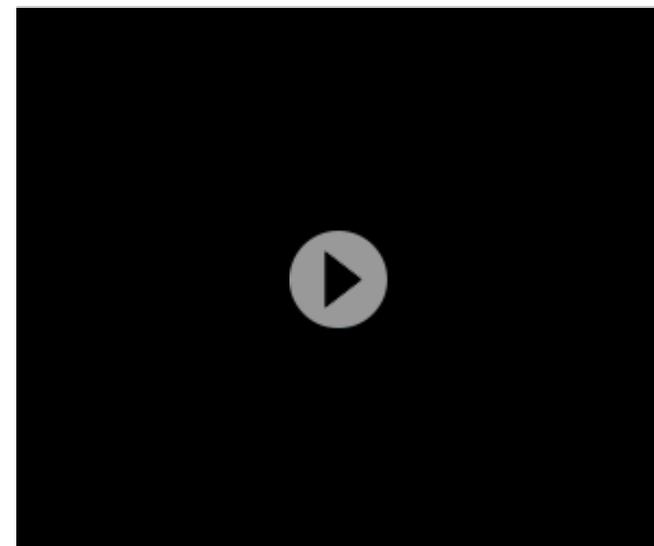


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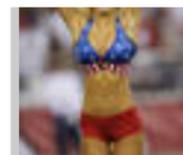
said with a smile, “To all the [expletive] talkers out there, you’re not going to run us out of town!” The statement was equally defiant as it was tongue-and-cheek, but mostly it proved that maybe they aren’t those bored and lanky kids who played Chicago a few months back.

Smith Westerns can really act their age, as they showed on Saturday night, and that’s a good thing. Their newfound youthful exuberance and fiery personalities no doubt stem from Smith Westerns’ wanting to be more than a one-album wonder. Proclaiming themselves as the next big thing in media interviews is one thing, but now the Smith Westerns are realizing that if they talk the talk, they have to walk the walk.

Richard Giraldi is a local free-lance writer and editor of loudlooppress.com.



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