



Smith Westerns seem burned out after hot year

BY RICHARD GIRALDI Nov 6, 2010

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The Smith Westerns, with singer Cullen

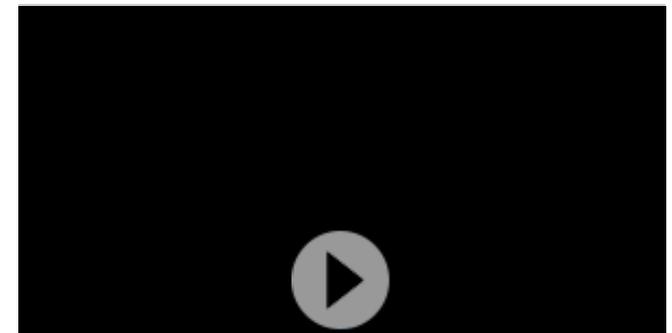
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The rough-around-the-edges debut from Chicago's Smith Westerns hasn't even been out for a year and a half, but it had enough pop sensibility and charm to capture the attention of music blogs both big and small. In a matter of months, the band was opening for national acts, playing major festivals and signed to a popular independent label. All of this before any of the

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Omori, perform Friday night at Lincoln Hall.

band members had reached the age of 21.

But now that they've announced a January release for their sophomore effort, "Dye It Blonde," Smith Westerns have to work on extending that buzz rather than letting it slip away - which may be easier said than done.

On Friday night, Smith Westerns performed to a moderate-sized but attentive crowd at Lincoln Hall. Their late-night set featured a mix of songs from that self-titled, lo-fi debut, which was recorded in guitarist Max Kakacek's basement, and songs from their upcoming release that was recorded in New York and produced by Yeah Yeah Yeahs and TV on the Radio collaborator Chris Coady. But while Smith Westerns performed their simple, adolescent garage rock with ease to a receptive audience, they displayed very little emotion or enthusiasm for a band that's on the cusp of breaking through.

Seldom could a smile be seen from front man Cullen Omori as his long, jet black hair hung low, leaving only half of his face visible. Bassist Cameron Omori, Cullen's brother, stood rigidly with his head down and stared as his fingers moved along the fret board. Even Kakacek barely budged from his spot on the left side of the stage; at least his glittery guitar leads made up for the lack of movement.

While the band's youthful energy never really materialized, the tracks from their 2009 debut sounded infinitely better live than on record. The veil of static and hiss was removed from the beach-ready, surf rock of "Dreams" and the bluesy bounce of "Girls in Love." Yet the night's biggest ovation came before their new single, "Weekend," which hit the Internet only this past week. The song's fuzzy riffs and tight, punchy drums worked in perfect harmony with Cullen's sleepy vocals.

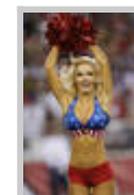
Before the band's final song, Cullen said, "We played here a year ago, and no one was here. So this is an improvement." But the venue, which has a total capacity of slightly more than 500, was not even close to a sell-out. If they really want their next hometown show to be standing room only, they shouldn't yet get too comfortable. Smith Westerns have garnered more attention in little over a year than some bands

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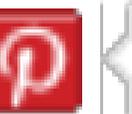
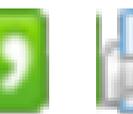


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see in a lifetime, but it's still a long way to the top if they want to rock and roll.

Richard Giraldi is a Chicago writer and the editor-in-chief at loudlooppres.com.

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