

NEWCITY CHICAGO



Home Schooled Local boys Baby Teeth have soul to spare

[Tom Lynch]

"Heather, my love, there's a new sheriff in town." So says Veronica Sawyer--Winona Ryder--in 1989's seminal teen-angst flick "Heathers." Local soul-rock three-piece Baby Teeth may have taken that as code when they decided to work on "For the Heathers," a three-song EP, each a band member's individual take on the name

"Heather." The band formed separate musical cocoons and resurfaced with three finished songs recorded at home. "Conceptually, we knew from the beginning what we wanted to do," says Abraham Levitan, the singer and keyboardist. "A dare went around in our tour van, that we would each have a home recording made in total isolation. None of us would know anything of each other's work. And each would be called 'Heather.' It would only have that in common. We thought if we did that there would be a unity we couldn't predict, but at the same time, we knew that each of us was afreak when it comes to home recordings, so there would be three totally weird and totally different songs. We all love home recording--we figured that this would be sort of the logical extension, where we could up the ante a little bit, as far as putting our home recordings on something." The songs are glaringly distinct--drummer Peter Andreadis' submission, a folk-pop jingle with acoustic guitars and layered vocals stands out as the most accessible, while Levitan's churns and burns strange eighties electro-pop with seventies R&B, a "Heather" of many idiosyncrasies. "We were doing it on a whim," Levitan says. "We didn't even intend on doing an EP. We're a type of band that when we get our full-length done, we have to start working on the next full-length. So this was on the whim side. This was a classic case of an idea that we had and we tried to see how far it could go." Baby Teeth's debut full-length from 2005, "The Baby Teeth Album," was a welcome addition to the Chicago roster of rock bands as the trio combined soulful R&B with kisses of seventies jam rock--a different sound when compared to the band's peers in The Changes or The M's--and had woven a record of skillful consistency. That record brought attention--as did a month-long residency at Schubas--and the band found itself drawing solid crowds to performances around the city. The new EP, a progression in both material and process, keeps the same tone as the full-length but expands on the band's songwriting craft. "I actually like it a lot better than the full-length," Levitan says. "Sonically it's a lot more diverse, a lot more ambitious. With the first full-length we were trying to say, 'This is our sound.' We were gonna try to lay out a clear idea of what our sound is. I don't think it ended up being as interesting as I thought the band was. The EP, if anything, is weirder than the band actually is. I much prefer to be on that side." The singer says that not using a typical recording studio was a relief. "I think it was like a vacation," he says. "By this point we're all in our late twenties--middle-aged in rock land--and we've all been in bands for a long time. To do something that was gonna end up being called 'a record' but it not feeling at all like the process of using a recording studio was great--being locked in a room with a bunch of toys, knowing you couldn't leave until you built the Leaning Tower of Pisa." Levitan, originally from Louisville, moved to Chicago in 2000 from New Haven, Connecticut, where he attended school. "I wanted to be in a place that had a good tradition of black music and white music," he says, "and I felt that this was the place. It's also a place that allows you to have a lot more longevity. Maybe I'm just being optimistic, but I think being thirty in Chicago is being twenty in New York."

Baby Teeth celebrates the release of "For the Heathers" April 29 at the Hideout, 1354 West Wabansia, (773)227-4433, at 10pm. \$8.

(2006-04-25)