

Black Mountain

Black Mountain doesn't have a creation myth, or not exactly: "Most of us were found standing 'round parties wearing similar T-shirts or shoes and nodding our heads to something cool on the stereo," Stephen McBean explains. "Others were heard from behind walls but never seen 'til years later. You share a smoke, do a shot then end up in a van together for what seems like the rest of your life."

In the late 1990s, Vancouver wasn't particularly renowned for its raucous, all-encompassing psych-rock scene. "Just like everywhere else, Vancouver's music scene has had its 'up' years, followed by its 'down' years," Matt Camirand says. "When a city is in a musical honeymoon everyone goes to shows, more places start having shows, more people start bands, etc. Soon it's too much of a good thing, people begin to take it for granted and eventually it all dies out like the dinosaurs. I think when Black Mountain started, Vancouver was near the end of a musical honeymoon."

That lack of sonic spirit, however disheartening, led to a certain kind of aesthetic freedom. It helped birth a sound – swampy, psychedelic, ecstatic, wild – unlike much else in the indie-rock universe. "The complete indifference here to rock music in general – at least at the time of our formation, it's a bit different now – made us completely unselfconscious about what we were doing," Josh Wells adds. "Nobody gave a shit, so we weren't making music for any people in particular."

From those dank basement parties, Black Mountain came together organically – vocalist Amber Webber was borrowed from another outfit and recruited for a 2003 tour, Jeremy Schmidt, Wells' downstairs roommate, was assimilated based on the strength of his "solo synth-scape/space rock," which according to Wells, "blew their minds" – and churned out a handful of striking lo-fi recordings. In 2005, on the strength of those tracks, Black Mountain signed to Jagjaguwar and released its acclaimed eponymous debut. "The band was really just being born during the making of the first record," Schmidt says. A follow-up, *In the Future*, arrived – to critical adulation and copious Devil-horning – in early 2008.

A little over a year later, Black Mountain's third LP, *Wilderness Heart*, was built on the west coast of America, in part at London Bridge Studios in Seattle, but predominantly at Sunset Sound, a former automotive repair shop in Hollywood that began as an outpost for Disney (songs for *Bambi*, *Mary Poppins*, and *101 Dalmations* were laid to tape there) before it went rock n'roll, capturing tracks from The Doors, Ringo Starr, the Rolling Stones, and more. L.A. – with its tacos and sunsets, starlets and hills and post-Deco kitsch – was a considerable inspiration. "Just being under the influence of one's surroundings, as we were while recording in L.A., had a tremendous impact on the process and the way we play. Consequently, the LA sessions have a free and summery vibe. The Seattle sessions, made in the grey, rainy environs that we're used to up there, have a chillier, more claustrophobic feeling," Wells explains.

"Shacking up in Sunset Sound for a few days put a smile on everyone's face," McBean says. "We were definitely spoiled more this time 'round as far being able to plug into a lot of pretty

historical gear. There's something about playing an old Martin or Gibson and thinking 'bout how many hands have strummed it and all the songs written on 'em," he continues. "You can't put 'em down – you want to continue the lineage."

The new record is packed with succinct rock songs that pulse and pound with startling precision: it pummels you, you ask for more. *Wilderness Heart* is arguably Black Mountain's tightest, most concentrated outing, but there's still plenty of raw rock energy at work. "It's our most metal and most folk oriented record so far," McBean says. "I'm not gonna say it our best record or the album that we always dreamt of making 'cause that's what everyone says. It's all about where we were at the time the machines were rolling. You can't control the electricity or how your limbs were moving that day. You have to erase the visions and just go along for the ride."

"It's a Black Mountain pop record, which is to say it's nothing like pop at all," Wells says. "This was the fastest record we've ever made. We're used to spending a lot of time deliberating over the songs and spacing out recording sessions over years. Start to finish, this album was made in four months, which is something like a miracle for us. We've never worked with producers before and that was a challenge; for us to let go and let two outsiders into the process, D. Sardy and Randall Dunn – it took some growing for us to be truly open, but this album is all the better for it."

The band cites a slew of disparate influences – New Order, King Crimson, Studio 54, Alex Chilton, sunshine, Janis Joplin, *Please Kill Me*, Shirley Collins, Mickey Newbury, jalapeno salsa, *Night of The Hunter*, Cactus Taqueria, Funky16Corners podcasts, Dennis Wilson, the house blowing up in the desert at the end of *Zabriskie Point* – but, as Schmidt points out, "Who knows how these things connect with the holistic mix of often dissonant forces that become Black Mountain?"

Indeed: Listen and find out.