



By hook or by spellbook, MGMT's *Oracular Spectacular* explodes in neon technicolor

BY ANDREW FISH PHOTOGRAPHY JON BERGMAN

Whether or not Ben Goldwasser and Andrew VanWyngarden of MGMT actually use magic to affect the world, the events of the past six months are exactly what would have happened if they did. From virtual obscurity came a dreamy, cathartic, almost absurdly catchy song about the inevitable downward spiral of the archetypal rock star — and it hit big. “Time to Pretend,” from the Brooklyn-based band’s first LP, *Oracular Spectacular* (Columbia), was picked up by KROQ, then Indie 103.1. With this energy infusion from L.A.’s dyad of milk-givers from which every undiscovered rock band longs to suckle, the “Time to Pretend” video — a trippy, neo-hippie, wild digital hallucinatory collage portraying a tribe of ragamuffin youths left to fend for themselves on a post-apocalyptic beach — tore onto MTV2 shortly thereafter. A month or so later, the band let loose the low-spark, future-disco track “Electric Feel” and the mantrically hypnotic “Kids” in rapid succession, both of which also hit major radio and the Billboard charts. MGMT have clearly tapped into something.

The band, formed in a college dorm at Wesleyan University, recently had their work featured on the CW network’s mega-hit teen-pleaser “Gossip Girl,” and were also invited to perform live for “Morning Becomes Eclectic” on KCRW. They’ve opened for Radiohead, and they launched their tour with Beck last month at the Hollywood Bowl. Whether their expeditious rise is due to their hitting of

precisely the right musical, emotional, and ideological notes at just the right time, or to a mystical catapult offered up by the spirit of Goldwasser and VanWyngarden’s pet praying mantis, whose bobbing dance inspired the jolly keyboard intro of “Time to Pretend,” depends on one’s view of the universe. Yet the fact remains that from high-school mix CDs, to public radio, to echoing out of tattoo parlors on Hollywood Boulevard, these guys are everywhere.

The swimmingly groovy “Electric Feel” video continues the epic imagery of youthful abandon, infiltrating a woodland bacchanal in full swing, as the cavorting pagan-tinged partiers capture the moon to bathe in the neon technicolor nectar that pours out of it — with a little help from a furry band of “Rock-afire Explosion” animatronic animals, resurrected from the days of ShowBiz Pizza (before the chain merged with Chuck E. Cheese and the snaggle-toothed bear got fired). Such affinity for sexual revolution-era esthetics, merged with science fiction, fantasy, and the roaringly silly, seems to stem from philosophies that MGMT genuinely hold dear. With little non-musical explanation from the band members themselves, their fans have embraced MGMT’s tongue-in-cheek, retro-tomorrow hook-and-feel as a call for change and questioning of the status quo. Digital-age kids are out there talking about peace and love, texting and forum posting their thirst for new ways of thinking, with MGMT as their goofy psychic guides.

As MGMT pied-pipe the children away from a world of narrow vision and conditioned thoughts by disrupting the continuity of recognized patterns, Goldwasser explains that they have no overarching goal other than to give everything we’re used to a kick in the noggin. “People are so conditioned to classify, or establish genres for things,” Goldwasser suggests. “How do I take this at face value? What are my guidelines?” Trying to get rid of that way of thinking. We don’t have to tell you where we’re coming from — it’s up to you to figure that out. What does it mean to you? We try to put a little more emphasis on the listener — to get them to get out of the way of thinking about things as they’re meant to be thought about.”

Ideas from the past projected into the future, with possible assistance from forces we do not understand, are providing a chaotic blueprint for young people to re-route the road laid out for them. The lyrics from a track called “The Youth” sum it up nicely:

The youth is starting to change.
Are you starting to change?
Are you?
Together together together together...

Oracular Spectacular, produced by Dave Fridmann, dropped early this year. See the “Time to Pretend” and “Electric Feel” videos at www.youtube.com/mgmtmusic. Learn more about MGMT at www.whoismgmt.com.