

Cultural Daily

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Coke Weed: An Addiction Worth Having

Tod Hardin · Tuesday, October 22nd, 2013

On Mount Desert Island, just off the coast of Maine, sits the small town of Bar Harbor – population 5,235. It not only serves as the gateway to the majestically beautiful Acadia National Park, but also to the majestic sounds emanating from a talented quintet known as [Coke Weed](#).

Over the past four years, they've self-released three albums, with their most recent, *Back to Soft*, receiving solid reviews and national exposure. Spin, CMJ and NPR's highly popular music show, *World Café*, have praised the album and it's been a hit on college radio stations around the country. Coke Weed has been classified as a psyche-rock band, with comparisons to such acts as The Velvet Underground, Mazzy Star, Galaxie 500 and the Crystal Stilts. You'll no doubt hear a little bit of all that, but there's much more going on there, and I would certainly suggest that it's worth giving a listen to if you like laid back, fun and well crafted music.

You can do so by watching the official video for their song *Anklet* – a track off of the new album, which Spin called a “fuzz-rock jewel.” Check it out and then learn a little more about Coke Weed from the band's co-founder, guitarist and songwriter, Milan McAlevey, who was kind enough to subject himself to a few of my questions. It follows this video:

Tod Hardin: Coke Weed...fun name. How'd you come up with that?

Milan McAlevey: The name was suggested during our first real practice with bass and drums and it immediately stuck. We liked it because of the sheer bone-headedness and the ersatz Cheech & Chong vibe. It's been crazy how polarizing the band name is and how much grief we've gotten. We even had a programmer at Maine Public Radio ask if we would change the name! So now it's a sort of a litmus test, like if you can't get with the band name then there's no need to waste time on either side. One reviewer said, “It's not exactly the most clever band name”, and I was like, “Right on, this guy gets it!” That was the nicest thing anyone's ever said about the band name. NPR's David Dye featured us on his *World Café: Next* series and I thought he would tease us about the name, but he was very cool about it.

TH: In one sentence, define your sound for us.

MM: Rock groove aliens in the land of tree folk.

TH: I hear many possible influences in your music. Are there any particular acts/artists that you yourself point to as having influenced your sound?

MM: Well before there's sound, there's the songs, and I have a lot of songwriting influences, but once the song is finished, we kind of put it through the choogler and try to make it groove a little. The Rolling Stones are a very big and very boring influence. The first three Funkadelic

records are touchstones, as are artists like Grace Slick, Bowie, and Francoise Hardy. Our influences are not super exciting or mind-blowing. I think the exciting part is what happens when the five of us get together and think we're in a Stonesy pocket, but it actually ends up sounding like ZZ Top and Nico.

TH: If Coke Weed was a 1980s network television show, which one and why?

MM: Haha. That's a tough one. I'm trying to figure out what shows I loved back then. My first reaction was *Small Wonder*, you know the terrible show with Vicky the robot girl? But come on! We're better than that! *LA Law* is a good candidate because of the strong writing and adult themes, but I thought it was a drag when I was a kid and my parents loved it; I didn't understand it. I remember *LA Law* had a middle-aged guy character that was developmentally challenged and that guy really got to me on an empathetic level, made me sad. So, the only real answer here is *Cosby Show* because it was the best. Like Coke Weed, *Cosby* ran with the tropes of the medium, but just nailed it in every way. It was exciting, smooth and sexy fun for the whole family.

TH: Bar Harbor, Maine ... it's out there. Tell us something interesting about the place that we'd never learn otherwise.

MM: There's a liberal arts college here and also one of the world's largest mammalian genetics research facilities. Because of the island's history as the summer home to the urban rich there's still a lot of heinous class stratification. People here are more rude than they are in New York. Bar Harbor is considered "Downeast" by everyone except people who live even more to the northeast, so luckily we still have some real deep-Maine issues, like gun-fighting and the state's traditional love of oxycodone and Allen's Coffee Brandy.

TH: I'm told that your lead singer, Nina Donghia, is a molecular biologist by training. Is she the smartest member of the band?

MM: Nina is indeed a molecular biologist and is involved in some ground-breaking research involving the genetic mechanisms that underlie blood cancers. Is she the smartest? Maybe. Pete the drummer is a computer programmer who majored in artificial intelligence in the UK. He's really smart as well. Zach the bassist is the only parent in the band; he used to be very smart, but all his kids have sapped his brainly resources. The two guitarists, Caleb Davis and myself, are definitely the dimmest stars in the Coke Weed constellation. (Sigh)

A big thanks to Milan for taking the time to answer my questions and for having a great sense of humor. You can next catch Coke Weed live on Friday, September 20 at the Shea Stadium BK, in Brooklyn, New York. For more dates and info, visit www.cokeweed.com.

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