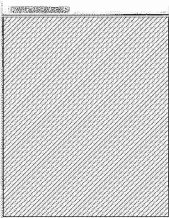


Backstage at Avi Buffalo's show at Brooklyn's Bell House, where the Long Beach band is opening for Sub Pop label mates Vetiver, the scene more closely resembles the innocence of a middle school dance than the debauchery of

a rock show. The band's manager, who seems more like a chaperone, makes sure everyone's gotten enough pizza, to which drummer Sheridan Riley replies, "I only had one slice. I should have another," while she pro-

ceeds to hand out the stash of non-alcoholic drink tickets amongst the all under 21 band members like she's doling out Halloween candy. But taking a gander at the track listing of the band's self-titled debut, the sheer licen-

tiousness of a few of the song titles ("Five Little Sluts," "Summer Cum") makes for a jarring juxtaposition coming from such a seemingly wholesome act, more suited to an R. Kelly album than a classic indie rock outfit.





Avi Buffalo's cherubic 19-year-old frontman Avigdor Zahner-Isenberg, who doesn't look a day over 16, awkwardly confesses, "A couple of the songs, it was like a 'what are we gonna call it' kind of thing. They're just titles, and 'Summer Cum' is only the first part of that song. But three sort of nasty song titles—I hope that doesn't define the band. Nasty Avi Buffalo. Likes nasty shit," he laughs.

With tracks such as the astounding lead single "What's In It For?," he shouldn't fret. The record's a compelling listen through and through, one that exhibits a keen level of craft anomalous for such a young band, which is rounded out by the aforementioned Riley, bassist Arin Fazio, and keyboardist Rebecca Coleman. But Zahner-Isenberg's an accomplished musician, having taken part in some decidedly unorthodox projects while in high school. "I was in this R&B band, the only white dude," he laughs. "And we practiced from like 9 p.m. until one in the morning every night, so that was when my grades started slipping. But I was also in a jam band, balls to the wall wah pedal stuff, so then I started Avi Buffalo to get some of my quieter stuff out."

And this quiet side of Zahner-Isenberg's persona captures the imagination of youth in a vivid manner that never relies on outright histrionics, revealing the naiveté of an act still defining their milieu. "I tried to do things that were more complex chord-ally," he explains. "Coming from a musical family, my mom was always playing The Beatles and Paul Simon while my dad was more of the the-

oretical guy, into stuff like Neil Young. And I started taking lessons from a blues guitarist who became something of a mentor to me, who would really put me on my ass and say 'your right hand, it's too tight,' and he taught me how to build a solo and stuff. So I had a little bit of that, and from 7th grade on I got into Wilco and Nels Cline and Jim O'Rourke, and that built

"From 7th grade on I got into Wilco and Nels Cline and Jim O'Rourke, and that built into more indie stuff."

- Avigdor Zahner-Isenberg

into more indie stuff. But really I just sat in my room and played guitar all the time in high school."

But what comes through most in talking to Zahner-Isenberg is the sheer awe at the opportunity he's been granted, and how quickly it came about. Few bands fresh out of high school get signed to a label as prestigious as Sub Pop before even embarking on a nationwide tour. "We were never really planning on making a record. It was more of a trying out thing, just spontaneity, but it's really about a million things we wanted to try. But next time we want to try a million more things, just push ourselves even further."