

The Black Keys

The critical darlings on the verge of commercial success



Photo by
Melanie Pullen

By Daniel Q. Marek
College Times

With their sophomore record now in stores, the blues-rock styling of drums-and-guitar duo the Black Keys has already gained legions of fans ready to swallow up the gritty sounds of '70s style rock.

Just off a recent stint with Sleater-Kinney and signing to Blues-loving label Fat Possum, they are prepped and ready for the long road ahead in support of *Thickfreakness* with tour dates jumping around the globe.

College Times met up with drummer Patrick Carney after a recent gig where the band stirred a room of 500 to their feet cheering on their infectious grooves, tin-can singing and fuzzed out guitar.

College Times: How did the tour go with Sleater-Kinney?

Patrick Carney: It went really well. It was a completely different audience for us. It was weird for me, because I haven't been to a big concert before. Our show at [NYC's] Roseland was the biggest concert I've ever been to. That was really mind boggling to me. It was a little weird being the opening band with such a different act, too.

You recorded *Thickfreakness* in one day in your basement right?

Yeah, basically one day of recording and a couple days of overdubs. We were talking to Sire and Warner and all these major labels, but we had talked to Fat Possum before all of them and we just wanted to see our options. But the major labels are so fucked up; it took forever to get anything done. So we were just sitting around waiting and Sony wanted to sign us, and the guy from the label kept saying, 'oh, just give me two more weeks and we'll get it all set up.' We basically told him we didn't want to wait anymore and we were signing to Fat Possum. He was begging us not to go and said it was a major mistake, but we thought Fat Possum could do exactly what we wanted. So the next day we called Fat Possum and told them we wanted to sign the contracts that weekend. When we got back from signing, we set up the studio with microphones and everything, then the next morning we went in and recorded the album and that was it.

So the album was pretty cheap to make?

To be honest, I bought the recorder and the tape a month or so before hand. So it basically cost us about 30 cents for the electricity. I think Chris Butler's new record must be the cheapest to make now, because he recorded it all on wax cylinder – so it was all hand cranked.

I've read a couple places that guitarist Dan Auerbach had actually traveled to meet T Model Ford a couple years ago. How did that inspire him?

Yeah, he basically drove down, hunted him down and they played together for a few days. I don't think he learned as much from T Model as much

as he gained in the experience of seeing and feeling how real his lifestyle is. He definitely got the vibe if you know what I mean. He went down for a day, then kept going back.

But you don't really consider yourself a blues band do you?

I don't, and Dan doesn't either. I think in a way it uses different elements of the blues and Dan uses those more than I do. I guess I am more of a T-Rex guy and he's more of a Son House guy. I don't know, I mean there is a huge blues influence, but there is a huge punk influence and everything else.

Are you sick of being compared to the White Stripes?

Yeah, we get that a lot, it gets annoying. I mean they're a good band and everything, I've listened to their record and it was good, but ... I mean I can see the vague similarities in line-ups, some blues riffs, and some people are like, 'oh, you both have colors in your name' – but it's completely unrelated. I mean if you sit down and seriously look at it, I guess you could do that with any band.

So are you and Dan brother and sister or...

No, we're married – in Rhode Island. (laughs) I mean, next week it may be something different, but for now, we're married. No, seriously, it's just getting a little old and leads to a little bit of resentment. I mean any band doesn't want to be compared to someone else like, 'Oh, you like the Black Keys, they sound like the White Stripes right?' There really isn't a lot of similarity there.