



The National, Clap Your Hands Say Yeah, Nervous Return
9 pm, Tuesday, 10/4
WOW Hall, \$8 adv/\$10 dos

National Renown

Two New York bands likely to win you over.

With the delicate opening of their new album, *Alligator*, The National sets the stage for their tale-spinning frontman. "I'm sorry I missed you / I had a secret meeting in the basement of my brain," Matt Berninger croons, his voice deeper than is the norm in most (rather effete) indie rock circles. Surrounded by spare arrangements, clear piano melodies, precise percussion and the occasional group-plus-friends chorus, Berninger roots The National's songs firmly in something murky and dark — but dark in the way a room lit only by candles is dark. On their fourth album, the band's put together something that glows.

The unexpected thing about this imaginative, intimate quintet is the way they sometimes — as with the guitar-laden "Lit Up" — veer onto ground more often covered by big, anthemic rock bands. But they do it in small steps, with a light hand, letting the music soar while Berninger's throaty, tired voice tells stories about wayward souls and uncertain futures. Strangely enough, it works: Let's call it dynamic stadium pop for small settings.

The National are on tour with the frightfully hyped Clap Your Hands Say Yeah, who write the sort of squirrely, energetic tunes that make you believe the reviews that say

they're exceptionally great live. On first listen, there's an oft-noted Talking Heads influence in the jittery guitars, and a hard-to-pin-down, familiar tone to singer Alex Ounsouth's meandering vocals. But the '80s jangle butts heads with an exuberant free-for-all sound that brings in toy pianos and opens the album with a carnivalesque organ and ringmaster chant. "Clap your hands!" exhorts Ounsouth, while the rest of the band complains, "But it won't do nothing!" "Details of the War" gets out a harmonica and builds slowly through unsettling images; "The Skin of My Yellow Country Teeth" follows with a dancey little drumbeat that shakes off any residual gloom.

What these bands share, despite their different sounds, is a perceptible joy in what they're doing. The National aren't afraid to let their songs swell with uplifting, hope-filled choruses; CYHSY natter on like there's nothing they'd rather be doing but spastic dances across the stage (this music practically requires that the singer be a little twitchy). Even for one's internal cynic, it's hard to fault a joyful band like CYHSY for their massive hype; they aren't exactly breaking new ground, but they're breaking a few old, tired trends. And three cheers for that. **EW**

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