

Wintersleep Hope For A Warm American Welcome With *Night Sky*

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THE CANADIAN MUSIC INDUSTRY'S superiority to ours is so boundless (their government gives grants to bands named Holy Fuck) that it's reassuring to know that occasionally our northern neighbors can be as clueless as us yanks. Just ask a member of the overwhelmingly powerful Montreal-via-Nova Scotia quintet Wintersleep. Last April, six years and three albums deep into a career packed with galactic beauty and volcanic noise, Wintersleep won a Juno Award for New Group Of The Year.

Almost a year after its Canadian release, their dynamic, award-winning third album, *Welcome To The Night Sky*, is finally available down here, and the group is currently in the midst of a lengthy American tour with Portugal. The Man. It's the group's first major push to make headway into the U.S. music scene, but drummer Loel Campbell won't take it personally if listeners make the same mistakes as the Canadian Academy Of Recording Arts And Sciences. "If nobody's heard you before, you're brand new to them so there's no way to expect anything else."

Though some groups might be thrown by having such a low U.S. profile years into their career, the roots of Wintersleep are set too deep for the members to get rattled. Guitarist Tim D'Eon and singer Paul Murphy were childhood friends in the tiny Nova Scotia town of Yarmouth, and D'Eon helped sneak Campbell into a bar for a show when the drummer was 15. D'Eon said that few traveling bands ever made it much past Montreal, but with the help of special ordering and knowledgeable older friends, they were always able to keep abreast of interesting music. After seeing each other at various local indie rock shows, Murphy and Campbell became friends and eventually moved to Nova Scotia's capital city Halifax. "Me and Paul started recording when I moved in the city in the fall 2001," Campbell says. "I had a small sort of recording set-up in my apartment at the time. We couldn't be very loud, so we just worked on songs quietly, not really getting to hash them out."

Shortly after D'Eon joined in to add guitar to the songs, the group were asked to play a party for the launch of a friend's new label in the spring of 2002. (Said friend, songwriter Brian Borcherdt, would go on to play with Campbell in their noise-core side project Holy Fuck.) They then recruited music scene regulars Jon Samuel for keyboards and bassist Jud Haynes (later replaced by Campbell's Fuck friend, Mike Bigelow). "Instantly after that we just started to get a lot

of steam," says Campbell. "We just kept getting more shows around Halifax and we started getting played on rock radio around there, and all of a sudden we kind of had a really big following there. This project was definitely a side project from the other bands that we were in at the time. But it just fully took over."

D'Eon says Wintersleep's 2003 self-titled debut was mostly the group members backing up Murphy's songs, and "not as much of a band effort as it is now." Because of financial limitations and some members' university obligations, the group recorded their 2005 untitled follow-up over the course of a year. "We'd go in like one weekend a month and just try and lay down as much as possible in the time that we had." Before that album, Wintersleep didn't tour much for a variety of Canadian-specific reasons. "The cities are a lot farther away in Canada and gas prices are even higher here, and there's less of a market," says Campbell. But eventually they began gigging constantly and building up a following. They finally signed with Labwork Music, a joint venture between the Canadian branch of EMI and the indie Sonic Unyon, which had success with Canadian artists like Eric's Trip and Hayden. With the help of Labwork Music (who later re-issued the band's first two albums) and a grant from the Department of Canadian Heritage—which, much to Campbell's amusement, would later be criticized by some conservative commentators for supporting Holy Fuck—Wintersleep was able to spend a luxurious three weeks working on *Welcome* with producer Tony Doogan, whose work with Belle And Sebastian and Mogwai were sonic touchstones for the group. "We were just really interested in making a cohesive record for once," Campbell says, "something that sounded like one band instead of a bunch of them."

Doogan pushed the group to experiment with different approaches and "not be so stuck on certain arrangements," says D'Eon. The result is an album of impressive breadth and verve, from the Paul Simon-like folk pop of "Weighty Ghost," to the moody, surging opener "Drunk On Aluminum," to the epic psychedelia of "Miasmal Smoke & The Yellow Bellied Freaks." Though the group is unafraid to explore, *Welcome* is ultimately tied together by Murphy's world weary voice and guitars large and beautiful enough to earn the group's album title. "I think that we can harbor all these different sounding songs in the same record and get away with it," Campbell says. "We're not interested in making the same record over and over. There's a lot of room for experimentation with this band."

Though the hit single "Weighty Ghost" made the group more popular than ever in Canada, Wintersleep couldn't find a U.S. record label they trusted. Major labels offered the oft-controversial 360 deals (where bands give up part of their touring and merchandise profits in exchange for promotion from the record company), but the group eventually decided to release *Welcome To The Night Sky* through Labwork here, almost a year after its initial Canadian bow. "There were a few different options that we could have pursued to make it come out quicker... but it's just nice to do things on your own," Campbell says, "and not worry about getting fucked over." Wintersleep's first two records were quietly released in America by Caroline Distribution without much promotion just before they began work on *Welcome*. After its release, Wintersleep "toured the shit out of Canada this past year or so," says Campbell. As such, the promotional push for *Welcome* is the first widespread exposure to America for Wintersleep, and vice versa. It's been a mixed experience.

Though Campbell said they had a great time touring with their friends in Wolf Parade, the group's gear was stolen during a tour stop in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. "I was the first one out of the hotel," he says, "and I walked up to the van and the front door was wide open. Whoever it was cleaned us out. They took all of our guitars, tons of shit. Like \$10,000 worth of stuff. Immediately you just feel sad, that people just have no problem ruining someone's life." Wintersleep were due to play the premiere of the Pemberton Festival the next day, "so we went to the airport and sucked it up and borrowed gear from friends of ours who were playing at that festival. We were running off no sleep for like three days. It was a really hard time. We just ended up trying to buy a bit of gear at least, like a guitar in Atlanta for like \$200 bucks. But we were able to get back on our feet. We're a determined little band."

As such, D'Eon insists that the group never felt any jealousy over Canuck groups like Arcade Fire and Broken Social Scene gaining popularity in America while Wintersleep remained unknown. In fact, he says that if Wintersleep seems like a brand new band to people, he sometimes feels that way himself. "I mean, I'm proud of our first two records, but I feel like this is the first record where we really nailed down what we're all about," he says. "It's just like starting all over again like we did in Canada, and just trying to build a fan base by touring as much as possible. I'm looking forward to crashing on people's floors and all of that."

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