

GRINSPOON

Black Rabbits

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Bad habits. We've all got 'em. Some are more public and less healthy than others. As far as Australian rock bands go, Grinspoon are more readily associated with that phrase than most. It's fitting, then, that they've chosen to name their seventh album after Cockney slang for bad habits: *Black Rabbits*.

These twelve tracks are the sound of a rock band experimenting with power-pop aesthetics, and succeeding. Following the heavy rock barrage heard on the East Coast quartet's last album, 2009's *Six To Midnight*, singer Phil Jamieson and guitarist Pat Davern were both motivated to write "lighter, more melodic" material.

"We were going for big choruses and major melodies," says Jamieson. "Lyrically, I was writing on themes that weren't too downtrodden, or too angsty. Musically, we wanted tighter arrangements all 'round."

Davern agrees. "I'd describe it as more 'songy' than 'riffy'. I didn't want to do another *Six To Midnight*, which had a lot of aggression. I didn't feel like writing that kind of music."

"I was listening to a lot of four-on-the-floor," continues Davern. "We hadn't really done any of that driving beat, groove-based stuff, which has more forward-motion than sideways-motion. I definitely had that in the back of my mind when I was writing: 'I want this to be *up*.' I didn't want there to be any kind of negativity or anger going on musically. I don't feel that way, and I don't want to feel that way musically anymore. I think you can hear that in the music that came out. It's different for us."

Emphatic lead single 'Passerby', at radio and available August 13th, acts as both album opener and a lens onto the band's newfound emphasis on melody and groove. It's the foundation song of *Black Rabbits*; the artistic breakthrough that the songwriters had to have before they could build the proverbial walls and ceiling.

"'Passerby' was a point of difference, and it didn't sound like we were treading water, or being lazy," says the singer. "It didn't sound like we were hangin' out, smokin' cones in Lismore – not that that's a bad thing" he laughs. "It sounded like we were *doing something*." Davern concurs: "It's a statement of intent that we weren't going to be doing the same shit we'd done before."

Los Angeles-based rock producer Dave Schiffman – whose past credits include Weezer, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Black Rebel Motorcycle Club and The Bronx – was chosen to handle the recording sessions, after all four members of Grinspoon fell in love with *The Bronx II*.

"As history shows us, Los Angeles makes excellent rock records," says Jamieson. "I think Led Zeppelin worked that out a long time ago. They're just really good at rock there. They're really point-to-point about it, so we felt that we needed to get over there this time to make this record."

Visitors to Schiffman's studio included Tim Rogers (You Am I), Chris Cheney (The Living End) and Scott Russo (Unwritten Law), who all contributed back-up vocals; Cheney even lends some tasty lead guitar licks to 'Another Sun', which Davern describes as the album's "Black Crowes-y, bluesy" track. 'Casualty' is a tale of "unrequited love, and the desperate measures one goes to, in order to feel adequate again," says Jamieson, while 'Branded' is inspired by the zombie-themed television series *The Walking Dead*.

The Lismore-born quartet – Jamieson, Davern, drummer Kristian Hopes and bassist Joe Hansen – burst onto the national music scene in 1995 via a string of hits which later appeared on their 1997 debut album, *Guide To Better Living*. The band's six albums have sold a combined total of over 450,000 copies in Australia, including multiple platinum certifications and an ARIA Award in 2005 for *Thrills, Kills & Sunday Pills* ('Best Rock Album').

"The reason we haven't repeated the debut album is because we can't," says Jamieson. "And I don't know whether we should, because we already did it. You just don't want to repeat yourself, ever. The body of work you've released is laughing at you, going, '*yeah, fuck you, you can't do that again! You were awesome in 2002,*

dickhead!” the singer laughs. “You’ve got to change the game for yourself, and challenge the band as to how and where you want to be.”

The chorus in penultimate track ‘Tightrope’ is the key that unlocks the album, and moreover, the quartet themselves after seventeen years together: “*You’re getting closer now to what you’ve always wanted in your life,*” sings Jamieson.

Reflecting on whether that memorable line can be self-applied, he says: “I’m not sure of what I want in my life; I don’t know whether anyone does. But this is a fucking fantastic gig, and I love it. I’m not sure where I want to be, but here’s pretty fucking good.”

- By Andrew McMillen