



ENTER THE RACCOON

WITH THREE MULTI-INSTRUMENTALISTS IN TOW, BROOKLYN-BASED RACCOON FIGHTER BREATHES NEW LIFE INTO ROCK AND ROLL.

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Upon first meeting, the three men of Raccoon Fighter aren’t necessarily what you would expect from a group of blues rockers who are rapidly climbing the ranks of the New York indie scene. They have a brutally quick wit, but also an easiness about them that reminds you they’re laughing with you, not at you. Brooklyn’s latest top-shelf indie export, Raccoon Fighter has the talent (and likeability), to be around for a while. Made up of multi-instrumentalists Sean Gavigan, Zac Ciancaglini, and Gabe Wilhelm, the group collectively contains more musical talent than most five-person outfits.

Raccoon Fighter’s stage used to be much more crowded. Over the years the group has gone from seven members to four members to just two members. After finding an ideal third musician this past year, they’ve hit their stride with a sound that is rich yet lean, deliberate yet raw, and accessible while unrepentant.

Raccoon Fighter is positioned to beat the odds. Their music is outright infectious. One part Rock and Roll, one part Blues, the band is built squarely upon something that the indie hype machine sometimes minimizes - musical prowess. Started by Gavigan and Ciancaglini, the band’s songs all originate from informal jam sessions between the two. Rather than the traditional fare of designated instruments, Gavigan and Ciancaglini switch back and forth between guitar and drums, taking turns writing different parts and welding them together to form an exciting live show that feels a bit like a never ending game of musical chairs.

Both Gavigan and Ciancaglini are highly talented musicians in their own right. Ciancaglini used to play bass but with the departure of the band’s former drummer, Ciancaglini made his way back to the kit, although this move has not been a downgrade for the band. Ciancaglini is as able a drummer as a songwriter and his frenetic, yet controlled drum patterns are part of what drive the band’s sound. Gavigan is equally as gifted, with a knack for raw, spare guitar chords, and a voice that is as much blind Willie Johnson as it is 60’s Rock and Roll. Wilhelm is the newest member of the group, joining just this past year. A multi-talented musician himself, Wilhelm is a capable songwriter and guitar player but bass is where he is most recognized. Wilhelm played bass on selected tracks of Ryan Adams’ Grammy-nominated album *Easy Tiger*. Despite the band’s fluctuation in numbers over the years, they seem to have found a chemistry that matches their musical prowess.

The band released two EPs this past summer entitled *Terrified* and *Liar's Feet*. Wedded together by alternate recordings of the shared track "Rollin' Wheel," the two EPs are clearly products of the same initial creative impulse, but are pleasingly distinct from each other. *Terrified* is more measured and melodic, while *Liar's Feet* captures the band's live energy, a more raw attempt that is rougher around the edges. The differences in these songs aren't a coincidence. Although released at the same time, the two EPs were recorded on a completely different timeline with a slightly different line-up. *Terrified* was recorded over seven months before the arrival of Wilhelm, a time during which the band transitioned from four members back to the original duo of Gavigan and Ciancaglini. The band was only able to get one studio session in per week, but the group of songs that made it to the EP came out deliberate, purposeful, and reflective of the oh-so-long six days of preparation between each studio day. *Liar's Feet*, by contrast, was recorded entirely in four days. With Wilhelm added as a permanent third and a handful of well-received NYC shows under their belt, a friend offered the trio a short span of free studio time. They jumped at the opportunity. As Gavigan describes it, "We tracked everything live and finished six songs in four days, sleeping in the live room on the mattress we used as a baffle and standing it upright when we woke up to start tracking."

At their core, the two EPs are just two different iterations of Rock and Roll. This is exactly why Raccoon Fighter will avoid being a seasonal sacrifice to the indie gods. *Terrified* and *Liar's Feet* represent Rock and Roll in its most basic sense - the violent shake of leg, the complaints from the tenants upstairs, the sore neck the morning after the show. It's the type of music your parents' parents wrote off as noise and the vinyl your dad listened to so often he wore the threads off, but Raccoon Fighter isn't just an imitation of bands past. They bring a sound that is still, at its core, quintessentially modern and an energy that could only be a product of our present day. In between the yelling harmony introduction of "The Upbeat" and the steady driving drum beat in "No Lover," we see a portrait of a band that is fresh and classic, refreshingly innovative, and comfortingly familiar.

Of course, simply summoning the Rock and Roll spirits of old isn't enough to have a significant following. One reason for Raccoon Fighter's growing popularity is much more basic - they're likable. On stage and off, the three boys carry an air of quick wit and playful self-deprecation. When asked how they would best define the band, they quip, "Six strings, four chords, three fingers, two assholes, and one really nice guy." In a scene that has its fair share of actual assholes (see: Nathan Williams' *Spanish Vacation*), a smile and a self-aware laugh go a long way. When asked what criticism they hope to never hear about the band, they quickly replied back, "Oh that band that sounds like 'Skunk Boxer'?' Their earlier stuff was much better." It's the kind of thing you don't always run across, especially in New York.







Despite only intending to perform once, the band began to play regularly. Gavigan recalls, "We had such a good time and people seemed to like it, so we kept it going." The seven-piece band would play together in Philadelphia or their hometown of Vineland once or twice a month, getting together the night before to rehearse and while the band didn't take itself overly seriously, the experience laid the groundwork for the current Raccoon Fighter. Gavigan and Ciancaglini moved to Brooklyn in 2008, with the purpose of continuing the band (now back to a duo), at the top of their priority list. The two arrived in New York and quickly wrote a new batch of songs. As Gavigan remembers it, "It was just the two of us in a room, switching back from guitar and drums when we ran out of ideas. It felt natural to play the songs that way." Indeed, the natural creativity paid off and the songs became much of the material for the EP *Terrified*.

After recording *Terrified*, Gavigan and Ciancaglini lamented that their sound "missed the backbone" and began looking for a bassist. Never waning from their good humor and pursuit of fun, the two added, "It's a lot more fun to play drums when there's a bass player that can really hold it down." The two met Wilhelm through some mutual friends in New York and the chemistry was immediately clear. Not only was Wilhelm a talented musician who had already earned his stripes in the recording world, but Wilhelm had actually grown up in the same farm town of Vineland as Gavigan and Ciancaglini. The duo asked Wilhelm to join the group and as RF puts it, "For the first time ever we had a lineup we were totally satisfied with." A new batch of songs was written, and *Liar's Feet* was recorded shortly thereafter.

With a highly talented ensemble, two released EPs, and a growing New York following, Raccoon Fighter is in good shape but what is to say that the band won't become the casualty of the ever unsatisfied music scene, the group of listeners with a short attention span and a thirst to hear what is brand new and unknown, often regardless of quality? While it is true that becoming a burgeoning band is no easy feat, Raccoon Fighter has a classic quality that might get them through the process unscathed. While many bands posit themselves as the next chapter in music (which they rarely are), Raccoon Fighter is working on mastering what is already innately there. While still a Rock and Roll band at heart, they skate between genres adding elements of blues and modern rock while avoiding any one genre too deeply to get them stuck. Genre can be a deadly thing for an up and coming band pigeonholing not only a sound, but an audience as well. In the self-selecting and self-segregating world that is indie music, often times listenership can be just as much about who you sound like as what you sound like.

In the midst of all that, there is a Raccoon Fighter. A band built on well-written music made by a guitar, a bass, and a drum kit. Classic yet modern, the boys are as much farm-town New Jersey as they are big stage Brooklyn. As newcomer Wilhelm describes it, it's the "simple approach of three guys working hard, making music, and having fun together." Perhaps it is fitting that their first large scale tour outside of the Northeast will be in Mexico where language moves to the background and the judgmental eye of "scene" plays less of a title role. On their first international tour, Raccoon Fighter's strengths will carry them along - the clanging guitar strings and jubilant symbol crashes - the kind of human experience that needs no translation. At their heart, Raccoon Fighter is a band that makes us dance, sing, and laugh. It is an experience that exceeds genre, a celebration that transcends national borders, and it is exactly why Gavigan, Ciancaglini and Wilhelm could very well be the next New York success story - because, even if only for a moment, they