

LONG WEEKEND

Indie-rock darlings Vampire Weekend return with a second disc — and hopefully, many more to come. By Kevin Raub



IN TODAY'S MUSIC WORLD, where albums are bought single by single and the immediacy of the Internet helps bands spike fast and fall faster, long-term, sustainable careers are becoming rarer and rarer. As a result, the challenge of overcoming the "sophomore slump" is one that is encountered less often than merely a decade ago.

So, with the release of Vampire Weekend's second album, *Contra*, the band finds itself facing that once-critical crossroads. But these Ivy League-educated New Yorkers deliver, using wildly contradictory music styles to weave an intricate opus that surprises and intrigues exponentially with each listen. We chatted with the band's bassist, Chris Baio,

about branching out — both sonically and geographically — for the group's second effort.

How relevant do you think the concept of a sophomore slump is in today's music industry? It's interesting. People usually phrase that question asking if you are worried about it. I'm sure there are still bands that come out with [only] one really successful album, but I know it's something we didn't really feel in making this record. The first time when we were working on things, we had no idea if anyone would be interested in it; this time, we knew for a fact people would be excited and interested to see what we came up with. We consider ourselves lucky.

The soundscapes on this record are weaved together tighter than a pharaoh's mummy wrap. How do you keep track of the musical vision in your heads? I think that comes from experimenting in the studio and seeing where the songs can take us. For every single thing that's in those tracks, there are plenty of things that didn't make it. It's a process of trial and error. There are a lot of minimal moments on the record. Ultimately, it's about putting in what feels right and stripping away what feels wrong.

To that end, do you feel Vampire Weekend has an obligation not only to please average music fans with a catchy tune but also to impress music intellectuals with bells and whistles that perhaps go unnoticed by the musical layman? Yes! We wouldn't necessarily phrase it that way, but we are very interested in pop music, and we want there to be something that is immediately and viscerally appealing in listening to a song. But we don't think intellectual music and pop music are mutually exclusive. I think even the act of writing a memorable song is a very intellectual thing. But we go about it wanting to have an immediate level that you can enjoy but then also something you can dissect further and get more out of with repeated listens — something you wouldn't necessarily hear on the first level. That's explicitly — *explicitly!* — a goal of our band.

You need a sonic passport to travel through this record — there's Brazilian funk, Bollywood-esque drones,

Latin rhythms, and West African guitar. Should Vampire Weekend be filed under world music rather than indie rock? Our music is all about taking an open-minded approach. We are never ones to say that a specific sound would be off-limits. The goal is to never make any one song sound like a genre study.

There are elements to this record — the use of Auto-Tune on "California English," reggaeton verses on "Run" — that on paper might make some fans cringe. Can you relieve their fears? With anything, we approach it in a way that we find interesting and unique to us. There was a sped-up reggaeton drumbeat on "Mansard Roof" [on our self-titled debut album], so it's something we have been interested in before. But it doesn't sound like Daddy Yankee. The way we used Auto-Tune on "California English," it doesn't sound like T-Pain. It's just a texture.

You recorded some songs in Mexico City for this record. Did you feel like you were cheating on New York? It energized us. It was the first time we recorded outside New York. Our studio there is in a very isolated storage facility. It's not in any way romantic.

What beverage would you say best complements this record? This might be kind of obvious but horchata, [the name of the first single]. It's a very fresh and refreshing drink. And freshness is a word that, in general, we use on some abstract level as something we want to strive for in our music.

