

SPOTLIGHT



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TAPES 'N TAPES

An indie-rock upstart finds space in its songs during a full-circle journey to independence

IN SOME WAYS, THE STORY OF TAPES 'n Tapes reads like a case study of how the music business has changed over the last half-decade. The Minneapolis quartet released its debut, *The Loon*, in 2005, independently (in the U.S., at least) on its own Ibid label. The buzz earned them a spot on the roster of XL Recordings and a bigger budget for their sophomore effort, 2008's *Walk It Off*. By the time the group began work on its new album, *Outside*, the members had decided to go it alone again.

"We'd saved enough money so we could do that, and the overall music climate has changed enough since 2005," singer and guitarist Josh Grier says. "We've always had a strong idea of how we want to do things. When we released *The Loon*, we did things on our own for a while, but it got to be too much, doing all the distribution and everything. There was a lot of learning going on. This time around, we've grown a lot, and bands put their own records out now. It's way easier to do distribution on your own."

Left to its own devices, Tapes 'n Tapes created arguably its calmest, cleanest-sounding album yet. While the group hasn't

completely abandoned the mangy guitars and rolling-boil drums heard on its breakout 2005 single "Insistor," the *Outside* tracks lead with melodies set high in the mix. "People You Know" is a '50s-style ballad about the comforts of home, while "One in the World" is a Spanish-tinged number complete with horns and castanets. "Sonically, we talked a lot about making sure there's space, where you can say, 'Oh, I can pick out that bass part,' or 'I can pick out what the guitar is doing,'" says Grier, who co-founded the group in Minneapolis during the winter of 2003. "When we were making the last record it was kind of a stressful time. We'd been touring a long time—a whole bunch of stuff was going on. I was more wound up, and that overflowed into the record."

While *Outside* will do little to quiet critics who incessantly point out the group's debt to '90s alt-rock acts, Grier pays such talk no mind. "I definitely like way more bands than the Pixies and Pavement," says Grier, who also cites favorites like the Beatles, Wire and Bruce Springsteen. "Hopefully, people see us for more than that. You can't ever tell people how to think about you. You just hope they do—and that they like it."

—Kenneth Partridge

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