



Music

Band on the Street

On the Genius of ZO2

Brooklyn trio is fucking with you, possibly

by Justin F. Farrar

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Look up any pic of ZO2, and you won't believe your peepers: The Brooklyn power trio, all boasting meaty pecs, resemble a Forever 21 train wreck starring Nuno Bettencourt, that one guy from Wolfmother, and an Italo-cokehead from Syracuse who digs Tiësto and Daughtry. Are these guys fucking with us? Maybe. The boys are, after all, currently filming one of them band-trying-to-make-it-big TV series for the Independent Film Channel: Z Rock, scheduled to premiere this September, is a reality/fictional comedy fusion also starring the delicious Joan Rivers, weed-smuggling survivalist John Popper, and Gilbert Godfrey (no witty qualification needed).

So yeah, those skin-tight tank tops and J. Lo shades could be nothing more than cheap costumes. Then again, over the last four years, ZO2 have done all the things that working hard-rock bands do: release a couple of albums (Tuesdays & Thursdays and Ain't It Beautiful), and tour with Poison and Kiss. (Which might explain the outfits, by the way: They could be gifts from Paul Stanley's personal wardrobe.)

But who really gives a crap about authenticity? This is rock 'n' roll, after all. For a couple decades now, lily-white suburban transplants obsessed with Thurston Moore have dominated this town. But ZO2, real or not, pray to far older New York deities. Joey Cassata and brothers Paulie and David Z hark back to a classic age when second-generation Italian- and Jewish-Americans actually born around here (or at least in Jersey or Long Island) dipped Zeppelin bombast in swarthy virility. We're talking early-'70s behemoths like Cactus, Sir Lord Baltimore, Blue Öyster Cult, and, yes, early KISS.

Even better, ZO2 aren't one of these retro/stoner acts—indie dorks who discovered Physical Graffiti in their late twenties. The trio comes off as a kind of hybrid: dudes following up teenage Zep worship with Aerosmith, the Crüe, Soundgarden, Stone Temple Pilots, etc. Then somebody lent them a copy of Wolfmother's debut, which kind of blows, but it taught the band how to ground K-Rock modernity in boogie's primal life-force. These guys are far better than the 'Mother, in fact, because they appear to possess all the sleaze 'n' cheeze central to classic rock. Retro bands don't understand this stuff: Despite some sturdy power-riffage, they're like sexless test-tube clones genetically prevented from equating "guitar" with "cock," and thus all the (absolutely necessary) bad-taste machismo that flows forth from said formula.

Of course, this is all nothing but guesswork. I'm not sure if I would ever want to hang out with these knuckleheads to learn the truth. But none of that matters: At least ZO2 has given New York its groove back. And that's aces.

ZO2 play Arlene's Grocery (arlenesgrocery.net) July 25

<http://www.villagevoice.com/music/0825,on-the-genius-of-zo2,471337,22.html>