



## ALL THEM WITCHES *SLEEPING THROUGH THE WAR* (NEW WEST RECORDS)

"Sleeping through the war -- this is what we're doing. There are so many terrible things going on in the world and we're just staring at our phones, and we don't see it so we don't care." Having just come in from practicing in the desert, Charles Michael Parks, singer/bassist for All Them Witches, elaborates on the very heavy times in which we all live. Parks and his bandmates -- Ben McLeod, Allan Van Cleave and Robby Staebler -- are enjoying a brief respite from the endless tour that saw them visit Europe three times in 2016. We've been talking for nearly ten minutes about Einstein's Theory of Relativity, among other things, before we cut through the cosmic fog that surrounds their new album *Sleeping Through The War*.

"It's tough to get passed all the cat videos."

From their earliest days, there has been a current in All Them Witches' music that has come from outside the continuum of our collective perceptions. On 2013's *Lightning at the Door* they drew a bigger chalk circle in the center of the crossroads and conjured a haunting occult-blues. On 2015's New West Records debut *Dying Surfer Meets His Maker* they dove the depths of oceanic canyons and surfaced with a shining psychedelia. *Sleeping Through The War* is the next step in that progression.

"We write in every way possible," says Parks. "There's no limitations on it, no *I'm going to come to it with this song and this is how it's going to go*. It's more like stretching your arms out and seeing who can grab what and seeing what fits together from there.

"This is the most I've ever sang on a record, so my writing process was a little bit different than on the other ones. We weren't relying on long, drawn out jam sections; we were putting more of a storyline into the songs.

"The songs are catchier, they're faster and there's more singing. Or talking. Or whatever I'm doing."

The result is evidence of the adventure, beauty, and excitement that lies on the other side of the galaxy. The fundamental laws that govern *Sleeping Through The War* are the same fundamentals that have made ATW a cult favorite -- big fuzz, deep grooves, cosmic vision -- but the journey through the wormhole has brought something else.

"It's more brain than body," says Parks. "Everybody kind of knows where they are going even if nobody knows where the song is going. We're good at juggling the torch around, making sure everyone gets to play..."

"Allan has this really unique approach to playing Rhodes. Robby's drums sound weird in soundcheck; he has all of these weird tones but he knows where he's putting them in the mix himself. I have a weird bass tone, but somehow it clicks. We didn't come into it trying to blend our sounds together. That comes from relying on something you already have, relying on something that has its own unique personality."

Years of jamming their way across the country have elevated their performance. Years of interacting with audiences has made their songcraft more responsive. Years of psychic interactions between band members has lead them into a sonic-space headier, more dynamic than any equation could have predicted. In the five years since their formation, over hundreds of performances and thousands of miles travelled, All Them Witches have expanded their *corporeality*, absorbing ideas both audible and philosophical that push at the thin veil of

existence. With three albums that each gained more heft than the one before, All Them Witches has accrued such an immense heaviness that when producer Dave Cobb entered their orbit the very nature of their reality was warped beyond recognition.

“We wrote it in about six days,” says guitarist Ben McLeod. “Wherein the past we would have just gone ahead and recorded and written in the studio, we were like *nah we’re going to do it with Dave, let’s be prepared.*”

“And Eddie Spear, the engineer, he loves doing 8 track records. We obviously didn’t make an 8 track record [laughs] but in the back of our minds we were like *this guy is gonna think we’re a joke if we’re doing all of this overdubbing shit.* We wanted a record that you could crank. And we wanted girl backup singers.”

It might seem like an odd detail -- Erin Rae, Caitlin Rose and Tristen add a classic rock flourish, at odds with their earlier catalogs -- but it makes sense within the context of the songs and within the context of their career. All Them Witches are at their *Ummagumma* moment, their *Tres Hombres*, their *Bare Trees*. They brought in a mellotron. Their sense of sonic experimentation is so finely honed that even the oddest, toughest moments are warm and relatable.

“We’re trying to get to something better -- not necessarily just as musicians -- but as people,” Parks explains. “I’ve always said that as we change as people, our music changes, that’s why we can never make the same records. I can’t be in one of *those* bands. I hope you’ll never hear about ‘another predictable album from All Them Witches.’ There’s no art in that.”

Their sound has become so expansive you can hear echoes of Dr. John’s *Gris-Gris* and the glacial expanses of Sigur Ros, the fire and brimstone of Appalachian snake charmers and the meditative *om* of the East. It’s the same balance of preparation and improvisation that helped drummer Robby Staebler conjure *Sleeping Through The War’s* vibrant and foreboding cover.

“I’m really into weird, film cameras and that was the original direction of the cover,” says Staebler. “Then Ben told me -- after working on this for weeks straight, doing all of these layouts, scanning things, looking for old negatives digging things up -- he told me ‘Eh, this is kinda boring, dude’. And for 30 seconds I was *really* fucking pissed.

“But I knew he was right. I knew it wasn’t what the record needed and so I just channeled some crazy Chi and the record cover came out. I just stopped thinking about stuff and got out film-negative dyes -- for retouching films, it works really great on watercolor paper too -- and the rest of it just came together. I found the channel.”

Their musicianship is so dialed in, so fluid and adaptable that the most technically complex and sonically detailed passages are fun and fulfilling. All Them Witches are progressing but they have no intention of leaving anyone behind. In a world where so many are distracted and disengaged All Them Witches are seeking to connect on a more visceral, more human level.

“The hardest part was the song “Bruce Lee” -- originally the song had this long introduction and not a lot of singing, just a long instrumental,” McLeod explains. “And Dave stopped us, had us come into the control room and said, ‘Guys, this is the kind of song that when people hear this they are going to want to listen to the rest of the record. You want people to hear the record and this song is your opportunity.’”

“It was weird at first, we were like, *but but this is how the song goes with the long intro and stuff*. We played with some splices and it ended up being what it is now and I think it is groo-oovy.”

Lead single “Bruce Lee” is a perfect distillation of the All Them Witches aesthetic -- whirlwind guitars, way out vocals and propulsive rhythms that recall Springsteen’s late-night power drives as much as they do Kyuss riding into the blood-red sunset. “Don’t Bring Me Coffee” is an aggro blast of anthemic, 120 Minutes-grade powerfuzz, that toys with the power dynamic between the beautiful and the ugly.

“Alabaster” feels like William S. Burroughs intoning to South Bronx breakdancers while the album closer “Internet” sees the band slip so far behind the beat it feels like they’ve slipped from the grasp of space-time itself. These tracks make the case that the gravity of All Them Witches is warping the space-time in which we all exist and that *Sleeping Through The War* is the sort of heaviness these weird times demand.

“If everybody would look out for everybody we wouldn’t have any problems,” says Parks. “If everybody had enough space to breath we wouldn’t have any problems...the hardest part is that everybody wants to be happy but nobody knows how to get there.”