Damon & Naomi Within These Walls

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In 2005, **Damon & Naomi** released *The Earth Is Blue,* an album that looked outward to all the places they had visited and cultures they've experienced. The release was also a voyage in itself, marking their departure from a ten-year relationship with Sub Pop and the debut of their own record label, 20/20/20. Now, two years later, and fully two decades into their uniquely realized career, the duo cast their view inward through *Within These Walls.* In what is undoubtedly their darkest record ever, filled with emotional songs and highly personal lyrics, Damon Krukowski and Naomi Yang explore the depths of the human condition, its pain and loss and tragedy balled up with the quiet beauty of existence.

And, beyond life itself, where to look for inspiration on such solemn topics? Everyone has their own sources, but Krukowski and Yang took it directly to the Chairman of the Board. "We bought lots of **Frank Sinatra** LPs, cleaning out the local stores. He released one sad album and one happy album a year, you can tell by whether he's smiling or frowning on the cover." Inspired by the way Sinatra sustained a single mood across an entire LP, Damon & Naomi set about recording the most emotionally consistent album of their career. It is also their most elaborately orchestrated. In the melancholic tradition of **Nick Drake, Sandy Denny, Scott Walker,** and **Leonard Cohen,** *Within These Walls* uses strings and brass to embellish the loneliest of lyrics. Soprano saxophonist Bhob Rainey, known for his work with the experimental "lowercase" group **nmperign,** arranged the sophisticated horns (played by Rainey with his new music colleagues Greg Kelley and Kyle Bruckmann), and lush strings (played by cellist Helena Espvall of **Espers,** together with **Vashti Bunyan**'s touring string section of Margaret Wienk and Katt Hernandez). And after so many albums and tours together, it almost goes without saying that the "silent third member" of Damon & Naomi, Michio Kurihara (**Ghost**), contributes his skills as one of the world's greatest electric guitar players throughout.

It would seem that in their maturity, Damon & Naomi have fully realized their ideal of how to write songs, and how to be a band. Their record label, 20/20/20, has now released five albums, including the *Galaxie 500 Peel Sessions,* Michio Kurihara's solo album, and a compilation of balladeers from Asia called *International Sad Hits, Volume One* (soon to be followed by *Volume Two*, which focuses on the Iberian Peninsula). They now produce and record their own albums, in between stints of design work and painting (Naomi), and writing and teaching (Damon, a published poet, has for the last two years been teaching writing and music at Harvard, where he recently had one group of students construct an orchestra solely out of materials procured from Goodwill). Meanwhile, they continue work on their other well-known business together, the publishing house **Exact Change**, which specializes in Surrealist and other experimental literature (most recent titles: Fernando Pessoa's *Education of a Stoic,* and Joseph Cornell's *Dreams*.) Twenty years after their daringly naive debut in **Galaxie 500**, the duo have achieved a mastery over their music and careers. *Within These Walls* reflects that confidence, taking new chances while maintaining a fundamental honesty. Never before have Damon & Naomi been so direct and forthright, nor so musically captivating.

For their US tour this October, Damon & Naomi will join forces with another group that has mastered the art of doom: **Boris**. Despite the extreme differences in musical vocabulary — not to mention volume — these two bands enjoy a mutual sympathy, and it is no coincidence that they each recorded their latest albums with the same stellar lead guitarist, Michio Kurihara. Indeed, Kurihara will be joining both bands on stage for this unique tour, which will take the "quiet-loud" concept to new highs, and new lows.

A UK/European tour is being planned for November. Damon & Naomi's band on tour this year will include Michio Kurihara (electric guitar), Bhob Rainey (soprano sax), and Helena Espvall (cello).

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