

## VUNDABAR

Words: Jens Heig Photos: Brandon Parrish



*We were cramped into a tiny, shitty garage where a makeshift stage was already filling half of the room — not your typical setting for a concert. Weed, cigs and a lingering smell of gasoline hung thick in the air as I sipped my drink, thinking about what I could expect to hear during this glorified house party. But then Vundabar struck the first chord in “Greenland,” the opening track from their debut album, Antics. Despite the venue, no lack of enthusiasm could be heard in the sound reaching my ears and I found myself suspended in a musical stupor, making a return to reality only after the contents of my tallboy had been emptied.*

DREW McDONALD.  
DrumsZACK ABRAMO.  
BassBRANDON HAGEN.  
Guitar/Vocals

“That’s the thing for a new band to pay your dues.”  
— Brandon Hagen

“There’s no such thing as a bad show,” says frontman Brandon Hagen in regards to playing in places like college town garages. “We’ve played so many of the classic ‘bad shows,’ but we would meet someone who helped us do something really cool, or get us a good opportunity.”

Don’t be fooled about our first meeting or labeling them as a pop band. Vundabar recently came off a European tour and then a stateside circuit where Brandon, who is lead vocals and guitar, drummer Drew McDonald and bassist Zack Abramo have taken their upbringing in the post-punk scene of Boston to festival crowds and bar patrons alike. In an age where the lifespan of music is fleeting, they rarely discriminate against an opportunity for a live show. “That’s the thing for a new band, to pay your dues,” explains Hagen.

And they’re seeing a definite return. A sophomore album, *Gawk*, embraces the idea of clashing melodies and jarring guitar that somehow still play on repeat in your

consciousness, rejecting the polished sounds that saturate the mainstream airwaves. Part of that idea originates in Boston’s musical counterculture out of which Vundabar was cultivated, where, as Hagen eloquently explains, “It comes with a bit of stifling social bullshit.”

The rough, DIY feeling of their tracks is a blending of tiptoe staccatos and obtuse riffs with interjecting bouts of melodic mayhem that are all bonded together by Hagen’s rousing vocals — a subtle nod to the pre-2000 works of Modest Mouse and indirectly, Nirvana. “They’re a band that wrote this content that’s really subversive lyrically, but at the same time it’s pop music and reaching a ton of people,” Hagen says about the iconic group. “So it’s getting a message across that otherwise wouldn’t have the same mass audience. Pop music is powerful in that way. It’s interesting what you can do with it.”

Call it pop, call it rock, call it whatever you want. Vundabar wants to produce songs that people will listen to when digital and

physical album sales are down and listeners are turning towards streaming services like Spotify, Pandora or iTunes Radio. Making it as a successful music act isn’t easy right now.

Part of their solution was to start a label, Gawk Records, and pay bills the old fashioned way by grinding it out on the road. “We all really enjoy it and it’s what we want to do,” says Zack. “It’s rewarding because I get to see all of these great new places that I would never see if I didn’t do this,” adds Drew. Talent paired with unadulterated passion has given these three 21-year-olds the opportunity to play sold out shows in France, Boston and England. Time will only add to that list.

Look at the tour schedule; figure out how to see them play. If your first Vundabar experience is anything like mine, you’ll forget all about the roofing materials and paint cans next to you. To them, every show is sold out at The Paradise Rock Club. 🍻