

The National * Sleep Well Beast

Four years have passed since the release of *Trouble Will Find Me*, and to the outside world it might have seemed like the members of the National spent that long interim working on everything but new National songs. But in September 2014, two months before the band headlined the 20,000-seat O2 Arena in London, Aaron passed along the first set of musical sketches to Matt. “We really didn’t take much of a break,” says Matt. “We started working on this record the minute we finished touring the last one. The only break we took was from the constant pressure we put on each other.”

“We didn’t feel like rushing it,” says Aaron, who produced *Sleep Well Beast*. “People thought the National went away, but we were just working on ideas.” With members now living in five different cities, the band made an extra effort to get together in the same room – sometimes in studios in upstate New York, or out in Los Angeles. “We’ve always worked on demos together,” explains Bryce. “But this time we were actually in the same physical space doing it.”

“When we all lived in Brooklyn we rarely did these kinds of week-long sessions” says Scott. “This time we got together for long stretches, just to mess around and experiment without deadlines or distractions.”

In February 2015, Aaron and Bryce convened for a series of writing sessions in an old church in Hudson, New York. Then, in the spring of 2016, Aaron completed work on his own residential studio, Long Pond, in upstate New York, where most of the album was recorded. “It’s the first time we have had a space of our own where we can keep all our instruments and work on songs any time, day or night,” says Bryce. Aaron adds, “The space was designed specifically for the band to make this album, with an open plan and no control room so that everyone could be wired up and playing all the time. The idea was to loosen the reigns and formality of our past recording process and allow for experimentation from beginning to end.”

Bryan describes it, “Getting drum sounds in a previously untested room was a seriously fun exercise in trial-and-error learning, in a group setting. Time disappeared, the sun set, and then the massive frog population in Aaron’s pond started singing.”

While the studio served as the home base, the band also sought outside collaboration. As part of a weekend residency at Funkhaus in Berlin, Bryce and Aaron invited guests to plug in and play along with instrumental tracks from the National’s work-in-progress. Bryce says, “We spent a week in East Berlin in this beautiful 1950’s communist-era recording studio with tons of musicians from very different backgrounds, just letting them listen and react to the music we’d been cooking for so many months within the band.” “It was a very interesting way to collect new sounds and process existing ones,” says Aaron. Late in the process the band convened an orchestra in Paris to record Bryce’s orchestrations for the songs before returning to Long Pond to mix the album.

There are songs on *Sleep Well Beast* that are instantly recognizable as the National, but others are much harder to classify. The lyrics are about “trying to come clean about the things you’d rather not,” says Matt. “Some of it’s about marriage, some of it’s about my relationship with Aaron and the band, some of it’s about train tracks and dancing.” Guitar solos appear like never before, yet on some songs guitars account for only a tiny fraction of the music. “It was important that we genuinely explore new territory and risk falling on our faces, or not make a record at all,” explains Aaron. “This album feels complete to me.”



2017

Planned Parenthood Official Women's March After-party and Show Up! Fundraiser in DC—Performance.



Aaron and Bryce created the HAVEN Festival in Copenhagen with Claus Meyer and Mikkeller Beer.

Bryce scores *The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson*.

Matt collaborates with artists and music industry professionals to produce *7-inches for Planned Parenthood*, a vinyl box set created to generate funds & awareness for Planned Parenthood.

Bryce to release *Planetarium* with Sufjan Stevens, Nico Muhly and James McAlister.

2016

Hawthorne Valley Association and MASS MoCA—Performance.

Day of the Dead, a 59-track Grateful Dead tribute—Album and Performance at Eaux Claires Festival.

Welcome to Hamilton—Performance for Syrian refugees.

Aaron produces Frightened Rabbit's *Painting of a Panic Attack*.

Aaron produces Lisa Hannigan's *At Swim*.

Aaron and Bryce score *Transpecos*.

Aaron and Bryce curate Michelberger Music Festival in Berlin.

Bryce wins Best Chamber Music Grammy for *Filament* with Eighth Blackbird.

Bryce composes *The Most Incredible Thing* ballet, with Justin Peck and Marcel Dzama.

EL VY contributes *Are These My Jets* to the *30 Days, 30 Songs* project.

2015

Charlotte and Gwenyth Gray Foundation to Cure Batten Disease—Performance.

Cooperative for Education—Performance at The Troubadour.

Dream Serenade—Performance benefitting children with disabilities.

Aaron produces This Is the Kit's *Bashed Out*.



Aaron and Justin Vernon partner to create Eaux Claires Festival.

Aaron and Bryce curate the annual Crossing Brooklyn Ferry Festival at BAM.



Bryce scores *The Revenant* (Nominated, Golden Globes).



EL VY (Matt and Brent Knopf) release *Return to the Moon*.

LNZNDRF (Scott and Bryan with Ben Lantz) release *LNZNDRF*.

Pfarmers (Bryan, Danny Seim and Dave Nelson) release *Gunnera*.

Bryce premieres new orchestral works with the Los Angeles and New York Philharmonics.

2014

Plus 1 donations from ticket sales during *Trouble Will Find Me* tour—\$100K.



Bryce and Jonny Greenwood release album of their orchestral compositions on Deutsche Grammophon.

Robin Hood Foundation—Performance.

Tibet House benefit—Performance.

2013

Bryce releases *Aheym* with the Kronos Quartet.



POLITICAL SUPPORT // BARACK OBAMA

In 2012, the National appeared at multiple days of campaign events in Ohio, including on-campus voter registration at The Ohio State University, Xavier University, and The University of Cincinnati; Get Out The Vote concerts in Cincinnati and Columbus, and a fundraiser in Cincinnati.

In 2012, the National performed at a rally for President Obama in Iowa.

The National opened for President Obama at a mid-term election rally in Wisconsin, 2010.

In 2008 *Fake Empire* was played at Grant Park in Chicago as President Obama stepped onto the stage for his victory speech and was also used in his campaign video.

POLITICAL SUPPORT // HILLARY CLINTON

Performed at 2016 campaign rally in Cincinnati.

RELEASES

2001 *The National*

2003 *Sad Songs for Dirty Lovers*

2003 *Cherry Tree EP*

2005 *Alligator*

2007 *Boxer*

2008 *The Virginia EP*

2008 *A Skin, A Night* (film)

2010 *High Violet*

2013 *Trouble Will Find Me*

2013 *Mistaken for Strangers* (film)

2017 *Sleep Well Beast*

