

*The Mountain Goats* are nothing if not unpredictable. Ever since their inception in 1991 each album offers the unexpected. Each song is crafted with intricate lyrics peppered with a wry humour and nostalgia. The humour in the melancholy is explored to the full in [new album Goths](#). GIGsoup's Jessica Otterwell caught up with Peter Hughes to discover what being Goth means to him...

### **What does being a Goth mean to you?**

People who didn't grow up in southern California find it hard to believe that 350 days of sunshine a year can be as oppressive as anything else, but it's true. I hated it. The cultural landscape of my suburban adolescence seemed vacuous and insipid. Goth was the opposite of all that. Years later I lived in western New York, where the Buffalo Bills — the football team that lost the Super Bowl four years in a row — are something like religion, and you could always tell the malcontents because they'd be the ones wearing turquoise and orange Miami Dolphins gear in the dead of winter. Being into goth in southern California was something like that.

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### **Why write a concept album about being a Goth? Is *Goths* a concept album?**

I mean, it's not a concept album the way *The Wall* or something is a concept album. It's not about one guy, it's not a story, per se. Like a lot of Mountain Goats albums, it's a collection of songs that take as their starting point a unifying theme. In this case, it's an album about goth, sure, but it's also an album about growing up, and the passage of time, and how our ideas of ourselves evolve over the course of our lives. It's an album about youth, but as seen through the lens of adulthood. Goth just happens to be a useful framework for exploring that kind of stuff.

### **Peter, are you responsible for the Mountain Goats shift in sound from the early lo-fi days?**

I can't take full credit, no, but it was definitely the case that when John and I went into the studio to record *Tallahassee*, the first album we made together, that was the direction I was pulling in. We'd been friends and I'd been on board with the Mountain Goats for ten years at that point, and I loved the intimacy and immediacy of John's home-recorded stuff, but I also felt like there was a lot more that could be done with his songs, and I wanted to take the opportunity of working in a real studio to swing for the fences. I don't know that we would've kept going in that direction if John wasn't ready to try something new too, though. Singing into a boombox is going to get old eventually.

### **Have the Mountain Goats had enough of their lo-fi roots?**

See above. Speaking more broadly, though, the thing about lo-fi is it was never an end in itself, at least not for us. It wasn't some sort of ideological stand, there was no lo-fi manifesto — or, if there was, I can guarantee it was written after the fact, as a joke, a way of proudly defending a way of working that was more about expediency and being young and broke and using the tools at hand than anything else. I love that there are people in their

teens and twenties now using their phones to make music with similar results. It's the exact same thing.

**You're always surprising and Goths is no exception. Which track from Goths is breaking new ground for the Mountain Goats in terms of style?**

"We Do It Different on the West Coast" feels pretty different, doesn't it? Now that we've been playing it live a little, I'm even more conscious of it — every time through I'm thinking, man, I've never played in a band that sounded remotely like this before! It's so much fun!

**A trait I've always admired in previous Mountain Goats work is the ability to write about dark subjects with an upbeat melody, Goths seems positively upbeat, with a wonderful wry humour. Was that a conscious decision?**

I can't say how conscious it was on John's part as he was writing the songs, but I think we have a natural tendency to try to go against the grain a little when it comes to arranging things. We like contrast. There's a line in "Paid in Cocaine," a song about a middle-aged guy going through his closet and recalling his days playing in a band, that gets me every time — when John sings, "as happy as I'm ever gonna be." That it's delivered so lightly, in the context of this jauntily swinging tune, makes it almost unbearably poignant to me. There's humor in the sad stuff, sadness in the funny stuff. That's life!

**What's your favourite Mountain Goats song and why?**

I'll never get tired of playing "No Children." What was I just saying? Humor in the sad stuff, sadness in the funny stuff?

*The Mountain Goats tour the UK in the Autumn. They will play the following dates:*

October 5th 2017 – Brudenell Social Club, Leeds

October 6th 2017 – Brudenell Social Club, Leeds

October 8th 2017 – The Button Factory, Dublin

October 9th 2017 – Glasgow Art School, Glasgow

October 11th 2017 – O2 Shepherds Bush Empire, London

October 12th 2017 – The Haunt, Brighton



*'Goths' is out now, via Merge Records*