

To NYC and back again

HUNTINGTON'S KNOCKOUT DROPS

By Ross Cohen

For citizens of Long Island and New Jersey, the relevance of your hometown is often measured in its distance in miles or minutes, from its epic neighbor across the bridge, NYC. You don't live twenty minutes from the Roosevelt Field Shopping Mall; you live twenty minutes from "the tunnel." And for local rock outfits, many would rather mine the dingy smoke-boxes (pre-Bloomberg) of the Lower east Side, than pay dues across Sunrise Highway and the L.I.E. It's not that Long Islander's are slighted by workhorse bands, earning the spotlight of the Manhattan scene. This is the necessary and cheered progression of a successful team. Just don't front.

This is why the favorite sons de jour of Huntington and Cold Spring Harbor, collectively The Knockout Drops, are relishing in their NYC explosion, with L.I. natives chugging along. Most New Yorkers were introduced to the Drops during their 2002 weekly residency at NYC's Siberia Bar, but vocalist Chris Campion is quick to expose that the Drops grinding work ethic started long before chic city nights. On the eve of the release of the Drop's most poignant and thorough work, *Killed By The Lights* and a July 5 gig at Amagansett's Stephen Talkhouse, the hilarious Campion spoke with *Good Times* about the record, the defunct Long Island clubs that birthed the Drops and his Rat pack "shtick."

How can you convey the excitement

prior to a new record's release?

I'm excited to the point of tight-chested-frequent heart attacks.

Well then, you must remember to bring your defibrillator on tour.

Some sort of apparatus always lends itself to the audience. It gets them on your side. That's why I always let 'em know I got a colostomy bag too (laughs).

Good Times is always excited about surging Long Island talent.

Where did you get your start?

I went to Huntington High School. There were places like Sparks, but it was such a metal scene around us. We didn't fit in, sounding more like the Replacements. We started in the basement at the Dock's Inn. And there was NY Avenue, but that's gone....My brothers are a lot older than me so my starter kit was Zeppelin and the Who.

The Drops have a curious Southern influence for a NY group. Was this a conscious infusion?

We opened up for Soul Asylum and the Violent Femmes. At the same time, we started listening to Johnny Cash, Steve

Earle, Wilco and some old Hank Williams. It somehow bled its way in there. "Rage Like a Sun" really sounds that way. Whenever you hear a lap steel, people immediately say 'Oh, that's country.'

Another noticeable track on the new record is Bill's Gay '90s. I'm guessing there is an interesting story behind the

He dated women and slept with women, but was just a confused guy. He told me a story about the first time he went to a gay bar. He was talking to this old guy who noticed his nervousness. He said, "Relax, we're all gay here." It's actually a crowd favorite. It cracks me up because people never know what to think. They're like, 'Is this guy gay?'

Your live show is notorious for band/audience interaction.

I got tired of seeing the segued rock show. Live always been a fan of Dean Martin and those kinds of entertainers. I've also done a lot of acoustic stuff over the years. You have to talk in between songs. It just seemed like there was more fun to be had. And we like to throw in at least one cover to show we're fans too. We do "Waitin' For My Man" (the Velvet Underground), but we do Bowie's version because he covered it too with The Spiders.

I was told you finally quit your day-job. No more slash or asterisk next to musician?

You're always dying to get out on the wire. But once you get there, you realize there's no net.

Knockout Drops will be performing at The Steven Talkhouse (Amagansett) on July 5th. ■



tune?

It's a bit of a curveball. I remember the first time we played it at Maxwell's in Hoboken. We had all these guys in the audience who were borderline community-college-football-flunkies and they were looking at each other asking, "Should we clap?" There's no autobiographical material there. An old friend of mine came out a few years ago.