

## HUNTINGTON Local Band 'Drops' Breakthrough Album

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### Knockout Drops set to catch nation in their headlights

By Brian Ferry

It started just like the old story goes. Man finishes with college. Has fire in his veins for music. Hangs out in bars and meets up with other musicians. Three dudes share beers, tapes, and stories. Start rehearsing together and play small dives. Finally catch big break and sign a record deal. Record a killer album that has the potential to really blow their spot up. Now, the rest is up to them.

The three founding members of the Knockout Drops met up in the Huntington bar scene and found they had more in common than the desire for a good Friday night's shellacking. Lead singer Chris Campion met guitarist Tom Licameli and bassist Phil Mastrangelo in the early '90s. The string players were graduates of Cold Spring Harbor High School and Campion of Huntington. Licameli and Mastrangelo were in a band and Campion was in a different band, but after being introduced through mutual friends, the three hit it off when they found common ground in classic rock and good literature.

"We just started talking about music and books — we had similar tastes — and decided to write some music together," Campion said. "It's just like anything else. You start talking about things and there were records that we loved and couldn't stop talking about. The Replacements, Tom Waits, early Bowie, The Jam, and groups like that. I'd seen their group play and knew they were good players."

The band worked their fingers until they bled, immediately creating a buzz and getting booked at good Manhattan spots like Brownies and the legendary CBGBs — where bands like the B-52s, Blondie, The Ramones, and the Talking Heads got their start. Their self-produced debut *The Burning Bush Chronicles*, coupled with an intense live show, got the attention of producer Joe Blaney who'd previously worked with The Clash and Soul Asylum. The group teamed up with Blaney to record their *Nowadays* EP and blew away any notions that they were an 'opening act' band by selling out New York City's Bowery Ballroom and Irving Plaza and shared the big stages with bands like Soul Asylum, the Violent Femmes, Better than Ezra, and Pete Dinklage.

As diverse as their stage bills have been, their influences run even wider, which is reflected on their new album *Killed By The Lights*.

"The people who influenced me were Tom Waits, Elvis Costello, John Lennon — the wordy guys," Campion said. "Tom has his favorite guitar players, like Roger McGuinn (The Byrds) Mike Campbell (Tom Petty), and George Harrison. These are the types of guys that influenced him. The Stones — the *Exile on Main St.* record — was a big influence on us. We're big Who fans, too.... We're big fans of music."

This spring, thanks to the addition of full-time drummer Vinny Cimino, the Drops took up residency at Manhattan's Siberia Bar, playing every-other Thursday to debut new material and get public opinions before it was set to tape.

"That was a great experience. We've done a lot of the bigger rooms and we sorta hit a point where we needed to do something different," Campion said. "We have so much more material now. We can get in there and do another record because we have a lot of backlogged material. It worked out that the shows were fun and the bar was really behind us."

Independent folk-rock artist Peter Mulvey once said of Tom Petty and The Heartbreakers, "They're like God's bar band. That style just really works for them." It can be said that the Knockout Drops are Tom Petty's understudies. Petty's influence is all over *Killed By The Lights*, as is the occasional moody element that can be tied to Waits. The songs feature some great, seamless transitions that allow them to sound like mature orchestrations, rather than elements pieced together in the hopes of a one-hit wonder. Campion's vocals are very strong, rolling up and down the scale to command the music and immediately grab the listener's attention. Some tracks also feature long, rocked-out instrumental departures that many bands reserve for the live stage. It's this live feel that Campion said they could never capture before on the recorded material.

"He suggested why don't we cut this stuff live and have everybody overdubbing," Campion quoted Blaney. "Let's get everybody in the room at the same time and whatever we had to fix, we'll fix. We would do 20 takes of 'Caught in the Headlights' and Jim would take the first one. But it really paid in dividends because we really like the way it turned out. If mistakes were made or dirty elements appeared, we left them there because it had a better feel."

Although the CD has a certain live feel, nothing can replace the real thing.

"Some good dynamic rock 'n roll. That's what we try to do, and we have some fun between the songs. It's not like stand-up comedy. It has more to do with what's going on in the room or I'll tell a story about the inception of the song. We have a very thirsty crowd. They're like livers with feet. Our goal is just a friendly atmosphere. We're not looking to be 100 feet tall or serve as a fashion band. It's more in the spirit of the people we love."

*Killed By The Lights* was dropped on the shelves Tuesday, but fans and those interested in hearing more can check the band out at their record release party tonight. It's being held at The Knitting Factory, at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$8. The Drops will also be playing a live, acoustic performance June 30 on 92.7 WLIR-FM.

"We're very happy with the way things are going now," Campion said. "We're looking forward to having a good year."