

New Year's Uncertain Future

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It's a treat whenever a new record from **The New Year** shows up, and not for the most obvious reasons, either. Yes, they're great, but it's because they've always been shrouded in mystery and uncertainty. The New Year (and their earlier, seminal incarnation, Bedhead) always seems to keep their fans wondering if each new album will be the last.

"We don't really plan things elaborately," admits main songwriter/guitarist Matt Kadane. "In general, we always know we want to make another record. But between the record that came out in 2004 [the prophetic-sounding *The End Is Near*] and this one [2008's *The New Year*], there were a couple of years where we weren't really doing anything at all. I mean, we were out working other jobs, but I wasn't thinking too much about music."

After the late-'90s dissolution of slowcore pioneers and indie rock stalwart **Bedhead**, Kadane and his brother Bubba left many an indie fan wistful for the band's slow-moving, melodic, heartbreaking songs. What would make things even more frustrating was the fact that Bedhead's swan song, 1998's *Transaction De Novo*, hinted at a band really coming into their own, and even showing a harder, more up-tempo side that hadn't previously been explored.

"I think at the end of Bedhead I was really sick of touring," Kadane says frankly. "There were so many things about it back then that really got to me. I had a lot of anxiety and I didn't sleep well. By nature, you don't sleep well and you don't feel that stable when you're on tour and everything becomes more exacerbated and it's kind of a nightmare. I feel a lot better now. Overall, I feel better psychologically than I did 10 years ago, so it does feel easier."

When the Kadanes resurfaced in 1999 as The New Year, they came armed with a new album, 2001's *Newness Ends*, and they retained their former band's mysterious nature (few press photos, minimal album liner notes). The record had a special air about it, as if it were a one-off special gift for Bedhead fans. While people hoped for more from The New Year, no one fully expected anything. And with three- and four-year gaps in between albums, it's easy to see why fans can never be sure of the band's future.

"I wish there didn't have to be such a long wait in between albums," says Kadane. "If we didn't all have to do other things and work other jobs, we would make records more frequently. But we have to do other things because the only way to make this band self-sufficient is to tour constantly, and I don't think any of us want to do that. That being said, Bubba and I have been releasing music for almost 20 years and have been making it together for a lot longer than that, so it feels totally, totally unnatural to stop doing it."

There's also the problem of having to best a previous album (or discography, for that matter) that is well-received and adored by many. When the Kadanes put The New Year together, they knew they couldn't simply rehash their old slowcore formulas. Bedhead had done it to perfection. Hence the more driving, propulsive back end of *Newness Ends*.

The New Year can still deliver heart-stopping melancholy, but they can also ramp it up and make your arm hairs stand on end. Their new self-titled record deftly toes the line between the band's louder and quieter moments. And this time out, there's a new element in the mix: piano.

"For me, what was so exciting was having my piano again," says Kadane. "I got a piano a long time ago, but

never had room for it, so I was storing it with my mom. I finally moved into a place where I could have it again so I was really excited to be playing that.

"A lot of the new songs generated themselves on the piano first. And also the excitement of having new songs led to that initial excited feeling to maybe assemble another record. But a lot of that can be traced back to the piano."

For the current tour, the band toyed with the idea of using an electric piano, but Kadane didn't like the sound of it and decided to play all the new album's piano parts on guitar. He says the set list is the most up-tempo and heavy of any New Year set list in the past, but that they still slow things down for a few songs.

"If we had nothing but the up-tempo songs, I think I'd be kind of bored by that," he admits. "Right now, I really like this mix that favours the louder songs. It changes, though, as there are times when we get lucky enough to play in front of really polite audiences who don't make any noise while we're playing, and in those cases, I really like playing the quiet songs. But it's inevitable when you play in clubs that you'll come across noisy audiences and there's nothing more satisfying than being able to drown out that noise with your volume."