Castevet (CSTVT) Interview

Editor's note: This interview was conducted with Will McEvilly of Castevet (CSTVT) in May of 2010. It was originally published on Sadness By Name, which was merged with Abridged Pause Blog in 2013.

-Alright so Castevet started when exactly, and how did you all meet each other? And what bands or projects had each of you done prior to this masterpiece?

> Castevet started about three years ago with me and Nick writing out like a seven minute long version of "Beating High Schoolers at Arcade Games", and Ron joined like two days after to play bass after we played the song for him.
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> We all knew each other through playing and seeing shows together in Chicago and the midwest. Nick and I met at a Lawrence Arms show at The Fireside Bowl And Lounge in Chicago in high school and kept running into each other all throughout college. We always talked about playing together but it didn't really happen until we both graduated from school and were living closer together.
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> Nick, Josh and Ron had both played in a bunch of bands but Castevet is the serious band I've ever been a part of. Nick played bass in a hardcore band called Big Ten Football and then drummed for Oceans, which were a really good post-rock band. Ron had played in a tech metal band called In The Wake Of, and is also currently playing in a doom band called Bongripper, who are also probably the loudest band in existence. Josh is a super busy dude, too. He's playing bass in Dastard, who do really catchy pop punk, and he also drums for a powerviolence band called Sea of Shit. He's always practicing his blast beats in between Castevet songs.

-And how does Castevet fit into this picture? Is it the main band for all you guys?

Speaking for myself, Castevet is the only band I'm involved in so it's all I focus on. Nick is pretty much in the same boat since Oceans broke up a little while ago. But he did just start playing drums in a band called Stay Ahead of the Weather. Our friend Evan who plays as Into It. Over It. plays guitar and sings, they just played their first show two weeks ago and they were awesome. And because we're not a full-time touring band Josh and Ron have time to devote to their other bands without too many schedule clashes or any one band taking over as a priority.

-Where was the first Castevet show played if you recall and how was the experience? Who was it with? Any covers played at that first show?

We played our first show in Urbana, Il on March 1st, 2008. We played with Mans, who were playing their first show after becoming a three piece, and with Oceans, who were playing their two-year anniversary show. It was a great show, too, Nick had gone to school in Urbana so a ton of friends in the area came out, and a few good friends drove out a few hours from Chicago to see us play. It was my first time playing live in a band too, so I was really stoked when someone I didn't know would approach me and tell me they liked the set. That's still the best feeling. No covers at that show, but we have been working on covering Cringe by Alkaline Trio a little bit between older songs at practice.

-Did you have a demo for that show? When was the first time you guys recorded?

We played our first few shows with no recorded material, it wasn't until we had finished writing the 8 songs for Summer Fences that we went to record with our friend Dennis at Comatose Studios. Dennis plays guitar in Bongripper, too, and he recorded our new record a few months ago in his new studio.

We had a three-song demo which had unmastered versions of “Between Berwyn And Bryn Mawr” “Plays One on TV,” and “I Know What a Lion Is”.

-Was this the same version of the demo that was made downloadable on your Myspace in November 2008?

Yep, we also gave it out at shows and I snail mailed a bunch of copies to people who were nice enough to give us a chance and listen to some tracks on our Myspace site. *Punknews* ended up reviewing our demo, which was really awesome because a bunch of people were able to find out about us who otherwise might not have been looking out for noodly Chicago punk bands.

-How did you hook up with Count Your Lucky Stars Records to release your full length “Summer Fences”?

Nick had gone to an Empire! Empire! show in Chicago and met Keith, who plays guitar and sings and also runs Count Your Lucky Stars. They talked about music, and Keith is a huge Mineral fan, so Nick gave him a copy of our demo to check out. The next day Keith sent us a message telling us he was really stoked about the songs and wanted to put out a CD for us. He released a CD for our friends in The Reptilian, who had a lot of really good things to say about Keith and Count Your Lucky Stars, so we were all for it.

Empire! Empire! played a release show we put together for Summer Fences last year in Chicago, too, it was a really fun show.

-I think its a brilliant record, and I seriously played it to death last summer. It was really comforting in bad moods and motivating in happy moments. How do you guys work on lyrics? Does someone principally work on them?

Nick writes most of the lyrics. I’ve written a few song lyrics for Summer Fences and The Echo & The Light, and Ron

wrote the lyrics to a song for the new record, too. We'll usually hammer out the instrumentals for a songs for a long time, and once we're happy with how everything sounds Nick will write the vocal melodies and Ron will help out with the back up vocals. Ron also does a big chunk of the vocals for one of our new songs and absolutely kills it, his voice was pretty wrecked afterwards though.

-Who came up with the idea of the artwork for Summer Fences?

The artwork was done by our friend Ben Sears, who also plays drums in Mountain Asleep. We tossed in a few ideas here and there but it was primarily Ben who brought everything together. A friend of ours told us that she met a dude from the UK who had the grumpy deer from Summer Fences tattooed on his arm, too! I wish that dude would message us, I'd be stoked to see that.

-So you guys did a short tour after that. How did you find the reception of people who had never heard your stuff on record and heard it live for the first time then? Was their special merch made for this tour? By then you guys were already playing Midwest Values at some shows. Was this the first song composed for the new record?

"Narrow Hallways" was the first song we had written for the new record, we were actually playing it live around the time we recorded Summer Fences. We toured at the end of the year with Grown Ups, that was our first time playing out for more than a weekend.

-The original, 6 song version, of "The Echo & The Light" was supposed to come out on Big Scary Monsters Recording Company, but after much delays it was totally dropped… What can you tell us about this?

The 6-song version was supposed to come sometime in February of this year [2010] on Big Scary Monsters. We definitely hit some speed bumps trying to get the record out, it was going

to be the first US release for the label and there were a few hiccups getting everything up and running. I think throughout that process we figured out that the label wasn't the best fit for us and we split amicably.

-You then went on tour with CD-Rs and tape versions of the 6 song version. How was that? Approximately how many tapes and cds were made for the tour?

I think we made 60 CDrs and around 50 tapes. We sold most of them on tour and at a few shows in Chicago afterwards. Our friend Harrison, who runs Kid Sister Everything Records in Chicago, helped make CDrs for tour, and our friend Kris, who runs Ice Age Records, made tape versions. The reception on tour was always really positive, Baltimore was especially amazing, a ton of people came for the show and went totally nuts and had a blast. During our set, I ended up getting lifted through the ceiling while I was playing guitar.

We were mostly playing newer songs on tour, which are a lot shorter and have a lot more energy live, so it was really cool to get positive feedback after a set because the songs were still pretty new at the time.

-You then re-recorded the six songs plus two new ones…

Not releasing the record on Big Scary Monsters did work out really well for us in that we were able to re-record the 6 songs along with two new ones. We weren't entirely happy with how the mix turned out the first time around, and there were plenty of parts that I could have played better or changed altogether. We're all pretty big perfectionists though, so it was really cool getting a second chance to record the songs exactly as we wanted them to sound, or at least closer to how we wanted them to sound. Dennis did a really good job with the new recordings, the guitars and bass tones ring out so much cleaner and are just massive sounding.

-Well, for a first, I noticed that the intro for "Narrow Hallways" wasn't on the re-recorded version. What was the reason for the change in that?

"Narrow Hallways" was the first track on the 6-song EP, so we recorded a short ambient segue before the drums started to start off the record. We're placing one of the two new songs at the start of the new record and took a similar approach, so I guess it's sort of the same concept but with a song that kicks off the record a little better.

We recorded some short ambient portions for both recordings as a way of tying the songs together and creating some cohesion, I'm really hoping that it's something we keep focusing on with newer songs.

-How did you end up working with Tiny Engines and Stiff Slack this time around? Was Count Your Lucky Stars not available or did you want to expand to new grounds?

We ended up with Tiny Engines through Chuck, who co-runs the label and also works with Beartrap PR, who helps promote bands on Count Your Lucky Stars and a bunch of other labels. Chuck liked the 6-song version of the record, and Tiny Engines put out records we really liked for Look Mexico and Tigers Jaw, so it seemed like a good fit. Tiny Engines also does a great job with the presentation for their records, that was a big thing that stood out for us, they work with a smaller crop of bands and put a ton of work into their releases. The new record is being pressed right now and we've worked really closely with the label every step of the way which is important to us, too.

Big Scary Monsters helped put us in touch with Stiff Slack Records. After we left Big Scare Monsters, we told Tak, who runs Stiff Slack, that we wouldn't be releasing the 6 song version of the record and were planning to re-record. He was still really excited about the songs and was willing to put

the new recordings which is really really awesome.

-Any plans to tour UK or Japan with those labels supporting you now?

We all have really busy work and school schedules so touring for an extended period, especially out of the states, is really tough for us right now. I'd absolutely love to, though, we've talked a few times about touring in Japan or the UK sometime in the next year or so when we all have a little more time to devote to touring. I studied Japanese in college too, so it'd be nice to finally apply it.

-How would you compare the new record to the old one? What influences have seeped in for you guys and how is the future of Castevet's song writing looking like?

I think the biggest difference is the length of the newer songs. When we wrote Summer Fences our quality control filter was a lot less strict, we tried to take every idea we had and find a place for them in the songs. This time around I feel like we took the parts or directions that worked best on our last record and streamlined them.

Nick's vocals also play a bigger part and are much more prominent and really drive the songs now. We also embraced distortion a lot more on the newer record, which fit well with the more high energy songs and really bumps up the dynamics. We've also gotten much better at writing as a band, working out parts together when we practice as opposed to throwing everything we've worked on independently into a single song and trying to make it fit.

-You're now working on a split with Into It. Over It, which themselves also just finished a split with Pswingset. What is the vision for this split? Can we expect a 7″ or 12″ length split? Any label you're planning on working with for this?

Topshelf Records will be putting out the split with Into It.

Over it. They just put out a record from Pianos Become the Teeth and recently released a full length for My Heart to Joy. We tried to reconcile our atmospheric side with our collective love of pop punk. The first track is very much something that would fit on our first record and the second song has a really upbeat Saves the Day and Mock Orange kind of vibe to it. It'll be a 7″ split, so we tried to do all of that in under five minutes.

-How about shirts, stickers and music videos?

Our friend Tony just finished designing the art for two new shirts. We'll be paying tribute to two of our favorite Chicago idols: Bill Murray and Michael Jordan.

Music videos might be a ways away, we're still doing our best to avoid ever having a real promo photo taken for the band.

-You are planning another tour right now for the summer. Where do you hope to go to this time? Any hope for people not fortunate to be living in the midwest, like Canada?

Our window for touring is still pretty small so we'll be playing a short tour through the midwest in the summer. We're really hoping to go out for 2-3 weeks this time next year though and play at a good deal of places we haven't had a chance to see yet.

The new record "The Echo & The Light" should be out for this summer's tour. So definitely pick that up!

Castevet's Myspace
Castevet's Twitter