


ALBUM REVIEW CONCERT NEWS ON THE RADAR

## Sleep Study Returns with Stellar Sophomore Album, Miss America

 by Scott Bryan

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Sleep Study- Photo by Elli Rader

Sleep Study is a band that obviously values craft, and they are paying attention to the world around them. The polished sound of their new release, *Miss America*, has taken artistic foreman Ryan Plewacki and his bandmates four years to shape into the album that will be presented to the world on Feb. 1.

The band's first album, *Nothing Can Destroy*, gained a loyal following and the respect of peers and critics. The single "**Flower Girl**" was nominated for an Independent Music Award and Sleep Study was named one of '12 Minnesota Bands You Should Listen to Now' by *Paste Magazine*.

After extensive touring behind the record, however, the band took a break that turned into a hiatus. Now, after adjusting the new material, much of which was originally conceived and tracked in 2014, to the changing attitudes and climate in America, Sleep Study is ready to retake the scene.

They come equipped with a new set of songs that catches just the right balance of celebration, melancholy, awareness, and reactionary emotion to deliver a powerful message and reaffirm the group's acknowledgment of both their musical history and the progress (or lack thereof) we have made since that cultural revolution.

Like any relevant piece of art, there is attention paid to the beauty and peril of modern life. Sleep Study makes music with good vibes in a time where the world around them is not operating at its most pleasant.

Their sound is akin to psychedelic rock of the late 60s and early 70s. Sleep Study would have no problem opening up for a jam band or digging into a southern California music festival, they would feel at home on the picket line or at the head of a protest. But the tracks on *Miss America* never feel forced or overdone. They're not preachy in their message, choosing rather to use a calming hand rather than blunt force. They do not drift into parody or mimicry of their idols, and the 'whatever man' attitude of hippie culture is cut away, leaving songs that aren't abrasive, but definitely have a subtle bite.

The first single, "Yourself Around," begins the album. It ambles in with the swagger of *Rubber Soul*-era Beatles riffing, and lyrics that stay just this side of politically charged. It's followed by "Counting Our Favors," redirecting the flow into a more mellow territory and avoiding the overbearing impact of many albums that come out of the gate swinging and peak on the second track. This arrangement allows the listener to get comfortable and slide easily into the strippeddown groove of the stellar "Red Light Player."

Sleep Study begins to get serious with "Hold it Down," upping the tempo on a riffing intro and stating "This time, it seems so clear. I've heard it all before, the truth won't get me anywhere." Then we get the anti-anthem "Party in Here," which couples youthful apathy with commentary on political indecisiveness and manipulation, hitting the refrain "you promise to the middle, but you're doing very little, you promise to the middle, but you're really doing nothing at all."

Midway through, we get the title track, “Miss America.” It attacks with a more rocking grit, and bares the band’s teeth, asserting “wave your guns in the air, show me that you’re right.” Then the album hits its crescendo on with the one-two punch of “Modern Man” and “Bleed Instead.” After the midway point, “Modern Man” lets the full breadth of the album’s themes of paranoia and distrust come waltzing out on display with a horn-section accompaniment, and when we reach the end of “Bleed Instead,” we know we are hearing something relevant, an album that is a product of divisive times.

By the time we reach the ballad “Gussing by God” and the joyful piano of “Home Again” we welcome the slower tempo and the warm embrace of a softer vibe as the experience draws to a close.

This album is not a vacation. The organic intention of the material is preserved, even though the group of talented musicians who created it have taken great care not to waste their listener’s time. It is definitely an album for the digital age. The solos are contained, the lyrical hooks quick and concise. The band doesn’t meander in introspection, but sneaks into the listener’s ears with tact and intention, planting message-grenades that detonate when one pierces the infinite listenability of the accessible instrumentation and polished production.

Sleep Study will celebrate the release of *Miss America* at the James Ballentine VFW on Friday, Feb. 1. The doors open at 9, and local rockers Black Widows and Farewell Milwaukee will help usher the new album into the world. Tickets are \$10 and can be [purchased here](#).