

# JUNIOR BOYS

## BIG BLACK COAT

The white noise backdrop of modern life means that without some fine-tuning on our part, even established and progressive artists can become elusive on occasion. But since musical creativity involves a healthy drive to self-determination and often a keen collaborative spirit, out of earshot doesn't necessarily mean out of action. Certainly not in the case of Junior Boys, who've readied a new album, *Big Black Coat* - due for release on 5 February 2016. A strikingly energised and intuitively dynamic set that reconnects them to their techno roots without sacrificing their soulful pop nous or riding a revivalist wave, it's also shaped by what Jeremy Greenspan and Matt Didemus have been doing in the five years since their last release.

The Hamilton, Ontario duo have racked up four albums since they formed in 1999, including their 2004 debut *Last Exit* and 2006's *So This Is Goodbye*, two rapturous – and rapturously received – records that were as poignant as they were impeccably produced, and prefigured the digital R&B so beloved of many an artist in the last few years. Two albums followed, the last in 2011, by which time high expectation had begun to leech the fun from making records.

The years since then have been filled with nourishing independent pursuits. Greenspan released two solo singles and a collaborative EP on Jiaolong, the label run by his old friend and fellow Hamiltonian Dan Snaith (aka Caribou, Daphni – Greenspan also mixed several songs from Swim). Greenspan also co-wrote and co-produced *Pull My Hair Back*, the acclaimed 2013 album from Hamilton singer, songwriter and producer Jessy Lanza (more recently they remixed *le1f*). Meanwhile, Didemus – who's now based in Berlin – started releasing solo tracks under the name *Diva* and launched his own label, *Obsession*. This shift in both Boys' focus was crucial to the making of *Big Black Coat*.

"One of the nice things about doing the solo stuff," Greenspan explains, "and in particular the album with Jessy, because it did so well, was that I could stop thinking about Junior Boys as being the thing I do and start thinking about it as a thing I do. That meant I could work on Junior Boys music with the same spirit as I did when it was new. It was hugely liberating and invigorated me, because I was doing things I felt really good and confident about. I was really happy with the last two Junior Boys albums, but if I look back on it, they were challenging records to make, in a way that this one absolutely wasn't."

This renewed vigour surges through *Big Black Coat*. It's what carries its overall sharp mix of sounds, and it's responsible for the use of a footwork tempo on 'You Say That'. It's what encouraged the pair to strip their original "complicated" version of 'Love Is A Fire' down to its compellingly looped bare bones and made Greenspan experiment with vocal treatments, as he does on the idiosyncratically Auto-Tuned 'Over It'. But it's the title track that sets the album's scene. Starting with a decidedly wintry feel, 'Big Black Coat' gradually warms and spreads light as it builds over seven minutes, nodding to Yellow Magic Orchestra ("their records are so strange," reckons Greenspan) and Plastikman as it goes. It also features a conceptually crucial percussion sound, made with a modular synth. "To my ears, it's the sound of fabric swishing," Greenspan says. "That day, I bought a coat – in fact, a big grey coat, but singing 'big black coat' worked better. And it really encapsulated everything I was thinking about when I made the album, so I wanted that as the title."

Junior Boys' two previous records were hung on movie conceits, but *Big Black Coat* pays homage to Hamilton – specifically, to the city in winter – as experienced through Greenspan's daily life/work routine. Every day, he goes to his downtown studio, which is three blocks away from one particular café/bar. He works in "short, intense bursts" and feels the need to get out, so spends his days shuttling back and forth between the two places. "It's on a street I wouldn't have walked on 15 years ago," he reveals. "Hamilton faces the same challenges that every industrial city in North America has had to deal with; the steel mill that employed 90,000 people now employs 5,000. It's not a dangerous city, but you have to have a tolerance for deep, human sadness. I love Hamilton – it's a great city – but if you live there, you are going to



Album: 'Big Black Coat'  
Cat No: Slang50089  
Format: CD / LP / Digital  
Release: 05.02.2016  
Label: City Slang

### TRACKLISTING

1. You Say That
2. Over It
3. C'Mon Baby
4. Baby Give Up On It
5. M & P
6. No One's Business
7. What You Won't Do For Love
8. And It's Forever
9. Baby Don't Hurt Me
10. Love Is A Fire
11. Big Black Coat

**CITY**  
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encounter something thoroughly depressing every single time you walk. So, the level of sadness around you is inspiring, but in a weird way.”

This acknowledgement of “deep, human sadness” is of course what’s always made Junior Boys’ tunes hit hard, beyond their irresistible loops and grooves. Along with a little humour, it’s certainly at the core of ‘Over It’, which was inspired by an eccentric character Greenspan knows from a Hamilton café/bar. “He looks like a pirate and is a local treasure,” Greenspan explains, noting his tendency for obsessive behaviour despite Greenspan recognising his puppy-dog sensibilities.

‘What You Won’t Do For Love’ sees Junior Boys revising Bobby Caldwell’s over-easy soul track from 1978, adding a subtle undercurrent of UK bass to what is only their second ever cover. Greenspan admits he knew the Roy Ayers and Tupac takes before the original. “There are so many covers of it that it made me feel much more comfortable about Junior Boys doing it. It’s like when jazz guys do a standard – who cares? Everyone does it. This is a disco-soul version of that.” Elsewhere, there’s an acknowledgement of ESP’s 1986 proto-house tune ‘It’s You’, which uses an ultra-rare Synton Fénix synth (‘M + P’) and a ballad that reignites Greenspan’s love affair with the hushed, soulful pop of Prefab Sprout, 10cc and Scritti Politti, via contemporary R&B (‘Baby Don’t Hurt Me’). Detroit is a strong undercurrent flowing through the record too, with nods to heavyweights Robert Hood, Dan Bell and Richie Hawtin throughout.

“I also love modern R&B and listen to that more than any other type of music,” enthuses Greenspan. “And I would love to make it for a known act, but when it comes to making music with Junior Boys, there’s a cultural/racial gap that cannot be crossed. I’m a white, middle-class, Jewish Canadian – I just don’t come from that place. So, I obviously feel some kinship with guys from the past who’ve felt the exact same thing. The history of disco is filled with guys like me,” he laughs. But for him, blue-eyed soul is also “dangerous music”, i.e. music balanced on the knife-edge between deeply heartfelt emotion and sentimentality. “People who can tread that line successfully are incredible. That’s what I mean by dangerous.”

Fusing disco and soul with the industrial pop and techno of Greenspan’s formative teens may not exactly be a dangerous act, but it is what makes Big Black Coat so distinctive and compelling. It’s the sound of Junior Boys both cutting loose and reconnecting. As Greenspan sees it: “The fact that we haven’t put out an album in a long time has been liberating, in that we haven’t been so phenomenally successful that everyone knows who we are. With this album, a lot of people will be hearing us for the first time. There’s a freedom that comes from that.”

## JUNIOR BOYS LIVE 2016

Support: JESSY LANZA

### EUROPE

- 16.02. UK London - Oslo
- 17.02. FR Paris - Point Ephemere
- 18.02. CH Zurich - Papiersaal
- 19.02. IT Milano - Magnolia
- 20.02. DE Munich - Ritournelle @ Kammerspiele
- 21.02. AT Vienna - Grelle Forelle
- 24.02. DE Hamburg - Uebel & Gefährlich
- 25.02. DE Berlin - Berghain
- 26.02. SE Malmo - Babel
- 28.02. DK Copenhagen - Lille Vega
- 02.03. NL Amsterdam - Tolhuis
- 03.03. DE Cologne - Gewoelbe
- 04.03. NL Zwolle - Where the Wild Things Are

### USA & CANADA

- 10.03. CA Vancouver - The Imperial Theatre
- 11.03. US Seattle, WA - Neptune Theatre
- 12.03. US Portland, OR - Star Theater
- 14.03. US San Francisco, CA - Mezzanine

15.03. US Los Angeles, CA - The Regent Theatre  
18.03. US San Diego, CA - Casbah  
19.03. US Tucson, AZ - the Flycatcher  
21.03. US Dallas, TX - Club Dada  
22.03. US Austin, TX - the Mohawk  
23.03. US Houston, TX - Warehouse Live Studio  
24.03. US New Orleans, LA - One Eyed Jacks  
25.03. US Birmingham, AL - Saturn  
26.03. US Atlanta, GA - The Loft  
28.03. US Carborro, NC - Cat's Cradle  
29.03. US Washington, DC - Black Cat  
30.03. US Philadelphia, PA - Union Transfer  
31.03. US New York, NY - Webster Hall  
01.04. US Allston, MA - Brighton Music Hall  
02.04. US Pawtucket, RI - The MET Cafe  
04.04. US Pittsburgh, PA - Altar  
05.04. US Cleveland, OH - Beachland Ballroom  
06.04. US Chicago, IL - the Metro  
07.04. US Pontiac, MI - The Crofoot  
08.04. CA London - London Music Hall  
09.04. CA Toronto - Phoenix Concert Theatre