



RELIVING THE DREAM

IT'S BEEN ALMOST 20 YEARS SINCE SONIC YOUTH UNLEASHED DAYDREAM NATION, THE ALBUM THE NEW YORKERS ARE SET TO PLAY LIVE AS PART OF THE NEW DON'T LOOK BACK FESTIVAL. FOUNDING MEMBER LEE RANALDO DIGS INTO THE PAST WITH MATTHEW HOGAN.

Sonic Youth are a band who still put out critically acclaimed albums regularly, thus have no reason to look back. Yet the New York band – undoubtedly one of the most important bands of the past three decades – are about to head to Australia as part of the Don't Look Back concert series and the Perth International Arts Festival to play their 1988 *Daydream Nation* album in its entirety.

They were hesitant about the whole exercise at first, guitarist Lee Ranaldo admits. "You know, we weren't very interested in this idea at the beginning," begins guitarist Lee Ranaldo. "We didn't think it held much warrant for us, this nostalgic exercise and looking back at a record. We didn't really want to do it at first. We'd rather spend time making new music than doing that. But, we were finally convinced to do it and the first bunch of shows were pretty weird; they had this almost kind of performance art aspect to it. It was not the spontaneous rock show we were used to going out and doing, where you make up the set list before you go on every night and there's a certain thing that happens on stage. With this record and this idea, you're going out on stage and everybody knows what's next and what's going to happen."

The band have snapped out of the predictable mindset, having performed the album 17 times so far this year, and now know how to keep things interesting. Ranaldo says. "I think that the first bunch of concerts, we were trying to figure out how to get inside this stuff and refresh it for ourselves," he says. "And then at some point along the way it just happened, where we really understood the songs more and were able to get more inside them and be happy playing them. We were greatly relieved at the end of the set when we were able to come back and do some modern music for the people."

In addition to being the year that *Daydream Nation* has first been played in its entirety live, 2007 has also seen the release of the deluxe edition of the record. Coincidence, no? "No, it actually happened quite by accident," Ranaldo reveals. "We were working on that stuff since we put out the last deluxe editions. We did *Dirty* maybe five years ago and then *Goo* a couple of years ago and *Daydream* was the next one in line. There were a bunch of different coincidences that happened around the time that we were asked to play Don't Look Back; the *Daydream* reissue was pretty much coming simultaneously; some guy wrote a book on this album for that series called *33 1/3*. Some of those books are good, they're really hit or miss and I don't think we were really happy with the one on *Daydream*, but it was another thing on this confluence of things. And then at the same time, the record got inducted into the National Historic Register Of Music – some nationwide music

registry in the Library Of Congress here in the States. So, it just all happened at the same time and I think that's just what led us to say, 'Okay, if we're ever going to revisit this record then this is the right time to do it'."

One might suspect that the Australian leg of Don't Look Back will be the last few times Sonic Youth play *Daydream Nation* in full, but Ranaldo says he wants to visit a few other countries first. "We haven't done it in Japan yet," he ponders. "I'd like to do it there. I still think we owe Paris a show. There's only two or three places left. We could maybe go to South America for some shows. Who knows? We don't really have plans to do it again after this but I'm sure at some point someone will come up with an interesting idea to do it. I would certainly go back to China and do it there."

When not being in one of the few American bands who ever get to play in China, Ranaldo is also in one of the few bands that form to record the soundtrack to a movie about Bob Dylan. The movie is *I'm Not There* and Ranaldo's name is splashed all over the soundtrack credits. "It came about just through a friendship with film's director, Todd Haynes, and the guys producing the music for the film," Ranaldo recalls. "Various Sonics worked with them before on the *Velvet Goldmine* soundtrack. And for this one, they came to me to do some stuff and I ended up doing a lot of stuff for it actually. I ended up making a lot of the music they used in the movie that wasn't Dylan music. It was a really fun project to be involved with. I love Todd's work and am a great Dylan fan, so it was fun to be part of it. We just did this concert last night in relation to the film's premiere in a couple more days and I think it's pretty much the last event for me in this sort of year and a half period of doing work on this Todd Haynes film. It's fun to see it end, but it was great fun to do it as well."

Obviously not one to rest between Sonic Youth albums, Ranaldo reveals he does have more projects on the go. "I'm working on a couple in various disciplines at the moment," he says. "I'm recording stuff on my own and I'm supposed to working towards a solo song record on Thurston's label which may some day see the light of day and I've got a new book of poems coming out. And I've been working on some visual arts and drawings and videos and things. So there's a lot of different stuff happening, that's for sure."

WHO: Sonic Youth

WHAT: Don't Look Back Presents *Daydream Nation*

WHEN & WHERE: Saturday 23 February, Perth International Arts Festival, Beck's Music Box, The Esplanade, Perth

