

## **From Abbey Road to Asbury Park: How The Grip Weeds Won Their War**

The Beatles are remembered as purveyors of peace, but their existence as a creative unit ended in acrimony in April of 1970. On April 7, 2015, one of the greatest Beatles-influenced bands to come down the pike will celebrate their reunification with the release of their new album "How I Won The War".

"Our sound isn't overtly Beatle-y but an observant listener can hear the connection," says Kurt Reil, drummer/vocalist for The Grip Weeds. "Our approach to song craft and the idea of using the recording studio as an instrument are both heavily influenced by The Beatles and George Martin."

In his capacity as producer at The Grip Weeds' legendary House Of Vibes Studio, Reil has worked with luminaries such as Mark Lindsay and Paul Simon collaborators Ladysmith Black Mambazo. Platinum selling Captiol Records artists The Smithereens recorded their two highly regarded Beatles projects ("Meet The Smithereens!", "B-Sides The Beatles") with Kurt Reil producing at the HOV. The Smithereens sessions also featured a performance by drummer Andy White, best known for playing on The Beatles "Love Me Do".

According to Reil, The Grip Weeds' connection to The Beatles goes all the way back to the band's origins.

"We named our band after a character John Lennon played in the film adaptation of 'How I Won The War'," Reil said. "As it happens, we went through an internal war during the making of the record that nearly split us up, so the title of the movie seemed apt for our new album as well."

The Beatles dissolved into a myriad of lawsuits and thinly veiled insults delivered via solo albums. It would be years before the wounds between John, Paul, George and Ringo would come close to healing. By the time the former band mates were on speaking terms again, John Lennon's life was obscenely cut short.

"The Beatles never got to write a reconciliation album," Reil said. "Who knows what kind of music they would have made if they came back together."

Although it's impossible to compare a band with a loyal international cult following such as The Grip Weeds to a behemoth such as The Beatles, the troubles that dogged the four lads from Liverpool are universal.

"The Beatles lived in each other's pockets but The Grip Weeds go way beyond that," Reil said. "Our lead guitarist Kristin Pinell is my wife; my brother Rick plays guitar and shares lead vocals with me."

The family dynamic within The Grip Weeds has been a double edged sword. Sometimes the familial ties have acted as a safety net, while at other times the band has been nearly impaled by them.

"Keeping a band together on any level is incredibly difficult," Reil said. "The fact that 3/4 of The Grip Weeds are related has at times helped us weather some rocky terrain. The B-side to that is when an argument erupts during a rehearsal or recording session it follows you home, thus intensifying an already volatile situation."

Reil is quick to point out that the Grip Weeds have never had trouble making music together, even when the pressures of running a band and studio have taken their toll.

"It's the peripheral aspects of making music that have sparked most of our troubles," Reil said.

Adding to the pressures of the group/family dynamic was the departure of Grip Weeds bassist Michael Kelly.

"When MK left, we considered breaking up the band, but family ties are strong and we also felt there was more for us to do musically." Reil said.

Enter bass player extraordinaire Dave DeSantis, a veteran of New Jersey music scene.

"What Dave did for The Grip Weeds is similar to what Billy Preston did for The Beatles," Reil said. "As George Harrison said in relation to Billy Preston, when you have company around you tend to be less bitchy. Dave's easy going demeanor put everyone at ease, and his musicianship inspired everyone in the band."

The new Grip Weeds album "How I Won The War" features 17 tracks that chart the behind the scenes turmoil and eventual triumph of the recording sessions. Included on the album is a radical take on The Beatles' "The Inner Light".

While The Beatles didn't actually play on the original recording, The Grip Weeds veered away from a classical Indian Raga treatment for their version, instead re-imagining the song in a Rock context. Oddly, the band hadn't considered including the song on "How I Won The War" until Marty Scott from Jem Records - the band's new label - connected the dots.

"Marty pointed out that we had Private Grip Weed on the cover with an 'inner light' coming out of his chest," Reil said. "He was emphatic that we had to include it on the album."

The cover art for "How I Won The War" is an homage to John Lennon's portrayal of Private Grip Weed. "The message you draw from it could be that John Lennon is now a ball of light, a spirit," Reil said, "but you could also conclude that how you truly win a war is with love."

Instead of just covering a Beatles song, The Grip Weeds folded "The Inner Light" into the album's narrative. For a collection of songs about conflict, "The Inner Light" is the perfect summation of what the band had gone through and learned from their struggle. It's how they won their war.