

# Music

Edited by Steve Smith • musiclistings@timeoutny.com



**Dark flowers**  
Beach House blossoms again on *Bloom*.

## Beach House

The dream-pop duo basks in its own sonic glow. By **Sharon Steel**

In May, Volkswagen released a new commercial in Britain, featuring a song that sounded strikingly similar to “Take Care,” the last track from Baltimore dream-pop duo Beach House’s third album, *Teen Dream*. It was a rip-off, done in poor taste. Fans were incensed, music blogs and *The New York Times* went digging, and Volkswagen and DDB, the agency that created the spot, quickly tried to absolve themselves of blame.

In a telephone interview following the media blowback, Victoria Legrand, the band’s vocalist, keyboard player and lyricist, answers questions in clipped, sharp tones. The timing of this whole debacle is awkward; it’s just a couple of weeks after the release of the band’s fourth record, *Bloom*, which Beach House had just celebrated with a show at the Bowery Ballroom. But beyond its meticulous songcraft, the band has built its reputation on its exacting professionalism and a precise thoughtfulness surrounding its work. “The priority is maintaining the thing that is real and honest to us, and therefore honest to our fans,” says Legrand. “It’s something to protect, and something to be grateful for as well.” On May 18, Beach House composed a short, diplomatic Facebook post to calm fans. “We will release a proper statement weeks from now, when we don’t have more interesting things to do/talk about,” the band asserted. Legrand and Alex Scally, the duo’s guitarist, long ago declared their

commitment to creating music that produces a utopian listening experience, in which the songs go beyond conveying literal emotion, to thrive in a place that trumps even the purest kind of storytelling. “That’s the whole point—we feel compelled to chase something we may never attain, but the joy of it is that you make something along the way,” says Legrand. “We make music because we love it and we feel compelled to do it. We’ll continue making records until we feel like we don’t have anything left to give.” This longing for transcendence coats *Bloom* like a new layer of skin growing over a wound. Legrand’s hypnotic, Nico-like voice floats above the organs and eerie pauses, and those spaces take on a warmth of their own.

Formed in 2005 and slowly embraced by the blogosphere, Beach House signed with Sub Pop in 2009. *Bloom* both reiterates the band’s long-standing philosophy and elegantly refines what Legrand and Scally have always said it stands for. “There were many, many terrifying and dark moments on this album, but there have been on all the ones we’ve made,” Legrand says of the recording process. “There’s always moments of freak-out, difficulty and frustration. But there’s also moments of elation and euphoria.”

*Bloom* as both a concept and a record evokes a number of ideas about rebirth and change, although Legrand is somewhat reluctant to explain the meaning behind the title. “Every album we’ve ever made is an album,” she says. “Each song can take you places, it can be a journey, it can be a cycle, it can be whatever you want.” Legrand and Scally’s assiduous approach toward writing, recording and coproducing *Bloom* was merely a continuation of past methods. “Whenever you are chasing something, everything is a lot harder,” says Legrand. “But I think in the long run, everything is better. I don’t think anything good comes easily.”

The singer admits that, even after just a few months, the album already feels representative of a pivotal period in her and Scally’s lives. But she’s quick to

**“We’ll continue making records until we feel like we don’t have anything left to give.”**

reiterate that their narrative is unique to them; the listener has to find their own way. “They don’t know us, they don’t know what happened,” she says. “But now it’s no longer about us—this music is existing in the world and it’s up for grabs and up for interpretation, and I think that’s where it’s supposed to be.” Letting people wonder and interpret the backstories on their own, she asserts, is the fun part. “That’s where art continues to be art. It’s in enough people’s hands; it’s being listened to in a car or in a bedroom or outside or at night or on headphones. It’s having a metamorphosis of its own.”

*Beach House plays Central Park SummerStage Mon 23.*

## Jennifer Castle

Union Pool; Wed 1

Listening to Jennifer Castle’s quivery, languid singing is like overhearing a conversation in the next room, or catching yourself in the mirror while talking on the phone—it’s so intimate and natural that it’s almost awkward. Same goes for Castle’s music: some lazy guitar strums, a swoon of slide guitar...not much of anything, really, but the sound is shot through with a rare and rather delicate beauty. Her song “Way of the Crow” suggests Sufjan Stevens, if Stevens had grown up like the lost kids roaming the Australian outback in Nic Roeg’s dreamy ’70s movie *Walkabout*. “Neverride” might be Devendra Banhart humming to himself while taking a bath.

As such, one almost doesn’t want to know anything actual or “true” about the singer; she seems to make much more sense in the realm of imagination. But lest you turn up to these shows expecting a tiny elfin creature accompanied by

bearded mice in straw hats, the facts are that Jennifer Castle is a singer from Toronto who has worked with the Constantines, Fucked Up and Doug Paisley, and who has one lovely album, *Castlemusic*,

to her name. It’s an unusual thing to encounter a genuinely mysterious artist, so this opportunity to see such a musician in loud, hot summertime New York is pretty golden.—*Sophie Harris*

TOP LIVE SHOWS

