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Mercury Prize-Winning Young Fathers Hits Moscow

By Timothy Misir

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At their second attempt, British rap, soul, dub-infused pop trio Young Fathers will play at 16 Tons on Saturday.

Fans of Young Fathers, the rap, soul and dub-infused pop trio from Edinburgh, will finally get to see the group play its first shows in Russia.

The group's shows in November were canceled because of illness, but have been rescheduled for Saturday at the 16 Tons club in Moscow and Sunday at the Erarta Museum of Contemporary Art in St. Petersburg.

The wait will be worth it, as the audience will get to hear new tracks from Young Fathers' as-yet unreleased sophomore LP, "White Men Are Black Men Too." The follow up to the group's 2014 Mercury Prize-winning record "Dead" was developed in Berlin at an artist's residency immediately after the win in October and recorded at the group's basement studio in Edinburgh upon their return.

"The album is a continuation — going to the next phase. A lot on the album is simplified. Less words and picking the right ones," group member Alloysious Massaquoi said about the album scheduled for release on April 6 on British independent label Big Dada.

If the gritty and soulful "Dead" reflected the group's coming of age, Young Fathers continues to break preconceptions of what hip-hop or pop music should be like on "White Men Are Black Men Too." The music is distilled and rawer and there are less distracting elements, allowing their vocal harmonies and beats to shine, as their lead single "Rain or Shine" shows.

"It's got that pop sensibility to it and that's how we approached it. Just simplified it a bunch. And I think when that happened, it put weight behind the words. We're really proud of it," Massaquoi said in a Skype interview from Cape Town, where the group is currently touring.

The Liberian-born rapper met the group's other vocalist, Kayus Bankole, whose family is from Nigeria, in his second year at school, and they both were introduced to third member and beat-maker "G" Hastings at an under-16 hip-hop night eight years ago. The three have been making music as varied as their backgrounds ever since.

Young Fathers had one of its busiest years in 2014, playing over 140 shows, releasing one album and recording another. "If there's an opportunity to record, we just jump on it really quickly. And I think working like that suits us perfectly cause we move so quickly."

The group were 25-1 outsiders to win the prize.

"It's been a very busy year, but we're just doing it without realizing it," Massaquoi said, adding that the group is looking forward to previewing their new tracks in Moscow. "It's been amazing. The whole anticipation to the tour."

Speaking to The Moscow Times last year, Massaquoi said that audiences can expect "three passionate men on stage giving everything they've got."

The Moscow concert is part of the British Council Russia's Selector Live Beefeater Sessions, a spin-off of "Selector," the British Council's weekly international radio show promoting new British music. This series of concerts has brought in new or innovative British acts like Wild Beasts, Young Knives, Plaid, and King Midas Sound to Moscow.

Young Fathers plays at 16 Tons club on Saturday, March 7. Presnensky Val 6, Building 1. Metro Ulitsa 1905 Goda. Tickets 600 rub from www.16tons.ru.

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