

Vampire Weekend Still Haunts Columbia

Spring/Summer 2024



Chris Baio, Ezra Koenig, and Chris Tomson. (Michael Schmelling)

It's hard to believe that [sixteen years](#) have passed since Vampire Weekend released its first album, a debut that would shape the sound of modern indie music and take the Columbia band-mates from student gigs to *Saturday Night Live*.

Formed by Ezra Koenig '06CC, Chris Tomson '06CC, Chris Baio '07CC, and Rostam Batmanglij '06CC (no longer a member), the Grammy-winning group, which played its first show at the Battle of the Bands in Lerner Hall, is known for writing literate, urbane lyrics and for making unabashed references to its members' college days. The cover of Vampire Weekend's 2008 self-titled debut album featured a photo taken at a Morningside Heights party, and songs like "Mansard Roof," "Campus,"

“Hudson,” “Young Lion,” and “[Harmony Hall](#)” are not-so-subtle allusions to the musicians’ time at Columbia.



Only God Was Above Us, released 2024.

Its new release, *Only God Was Above Us*, the band’s first studio album in five years, reveals that Vampire Weekend continues to be inspired by the city of New York and by nostalgia for jam sessions in college dorms. “I personally found an immense peace and pleasure in creating with the guys like we had in the Ruggles [Hall] days,” drummer Tomson has said about the making of the album. “The vibe was strong.”

While superfans may parse the new album’s lyrics for erudite references, some sources of inspiration are more obvious. The title comes from a *Daily News* headline featured on the album cover. The image was shot more than thirty years ago by Steven Siegel, a street photographer who captured the gritty energy of New York.

The music video for the single “[Capricorn](#)” also incorporates retro footage of the city in the ’70s and ’80s, including a shot of the Cathedral Parkway–110th Street train station near Columbia. The video ends with the band performing in an ornate academic-style library to a very serious audience. As Tomson might note, the Butler vibe is strong.

The *Only God Was Above Us* concert tour is scheduled to include thirty-nine shows across the United States and Canada through the fall, with performances at Madison

Square Garden on October 5 and 6.

This article appears in the Spring/Summer 2024 print edition of Columbia Magazine with the title "Vampire Weekend Is Back."



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