



PIERRE OBENDRAUF THE GAZETTE

From left: Warren C. Spicer, Matthew Woodley and Nicolas Basque will launch their debut album at La Sala Rossa.

Get ready for the next big one

Mark Tuesday on your calendar. On that date, Plants and Animals will release *Parc Avenue*, an album with a spirit of adventure that will add the band to Montreal's growing legion of visionary rock groups

T'CHA DUNLEVY
GAZETTE MUSIC CRITIC

A couple months ago, my friend Ryan Morey started talking to me, in a hushed, excited tone, about the new Plants and Animals record. The words "this year's Arcade Fire" may have been mentioned.

Morey is a mastering engineer. Once records have been recorded and mixed, he makes them sound just so. The last time he used the above words, it was in reference to Malajube, whose awesome album *Trompe l'oeil*

On Tuesday, Plants and Animals will release their debut album *Parc Avenue*, on Secret City records (home to dream-pop phenom Patrick Watson), and their name will be added to our town's growing legion of visionary rock groups.

Like the storied street after which it was named, *Parc Avenue* is *BIG* – a swooning folk-rock opus with chorales, horns, strings (courtesy of Arcade Fire violinist Sarah Neufeld), stirring instrumental passages and heart-rending hooks – but it started small.

Fast friends (and jam-mates) since junior high in

"We weren't doing much soloing. We were more just building repetitive post-rock instrumental stuff," Spicer said.

This served them well in their ability to craft the stirring instrumental passages mentioned earlier, but it had its limitations. It's when Plants and Animals came up against those limitations, and began to go beyond them, that things got interesting.

"We had to learn to make a song with a beginning and an end," Woodley said. "I don't think we had an ending on a song for the first few years we played together. It just kind of went somewhere."

"They were just blobs," Spicer opined.

"We played shows," Woodley said, "and there were always good moments ... But as a whole, it wasn't tight."

They booked a week's worth of time at their friends' studio the Treatment Room in 2005, thinking they would put out an album in a few months. Two years later, *Parc Avenue* was born.

"Things kept getting pushed back as we worked on songs," Spicer said. "We weren't tweaking or fine-tuning them, we just kept recording more and more – we would throw out the old stuff, in with the new."

Eventually, they hit pay dirt. Something clicked. A door opened.

"What was the first song we finished, with words? Mercy?" Spicer asked. "Once we had one or two, we saw that

we could do a song. ... We kept going back into the studio. We might record five things, take half of one of those, then rehearse (around that), and go back into the studio a couple of months later with that idea turned into a song...

"Once we started to get better at it, we realized we were going to make a rock record... We could do this. And we got really excited."

Along the way, Spicer learned how to sing. Until then, he was known as a nimble guitarist. He met local folk-country siren Katie Moore and began backing her up, on guitar and voice.

"I started singing along," he said. "It reawakened things I had grown up with, but had lost touch with ... It was confidence-building."

Spicer, Woodley and Moore joined singer-songwriter Dave Macleod in his alt-folk band Timber. Spicer produced Moore's album *Only Thing Worse*, and two by local folk-rock duo Orillia Oprey.

All of which was formative, but none of which explains the spirit of adventure, the wild flight of fancy that is *Parc Avenue*. "The record is really a document of us figuring out how to make songs," Spicer said. "It's a document of our evolution."

Plants and Animals launch *Parc Avenue* with a concert at La Sala Rossa, 4848 St. Laurent Blvd., Tuesday at 9 p.m. David Macleod opens. Tickets cost \$10 in advance, \$12 at the door. Call 514-284-0122 or go to www.blueskiesturnblack.com. For more info, see www.myspace.com/plantsandanimals

tdunlevy@thegazette.canwest.com

"... we just kept recording more and more – we would throw out the old stuff, in with the new."

Plants and Animals' singer/guitarist Warren C. Spicer

(which Morey mastered) went on to be heralded as a watershed release on Quebec's francophone rock scene.

The time before – well, perhaps he didn't say "this year's Arcade Fire," because we were talking about the Arcade Fire's huge, classic, ticket-to-the-world album *Funeral*, which Morey also mastered.

If making *BIG* albums were easy, they'd be a dime a dozen – albums with ambition, spirit, a sense of grandeur, that fill you up and make you excited about life. A handful of bands in Montreal's thriving indie-music scene have managed the feat in the past few years. Now, make that a handful plus-one.

Halifax, guitarist Warren C. Spicer and drummer Matthew Woodley met bassist-guitarist Nicolas Basque in 2001 in Concordia's electro-acoustics program.

"It's probably the reason we make the music we do," Spicer said. "I don't know if you've ever listened to much electro-acoustic music. It requires a lot of patience and attention. We went through that and came out the other side and I went, 'Oh my god, give me a guitar again. I just want to play some songs.'"

But the "songs" didn't come right away. Plants and Animals spent a few years as a loose-knit jam band – oops, bad word.