

VIETNAM



"There was nothing mediocre. People either really got it or they really

**F**or the moment, Vietnamese lives in a storefront apartment on a corner of Williamsburg that looks gray no matter what season it is. The glass front has been painted over and the door is always open, and much of the time there are friends and neighbors—humans and cats—wandering around out of the blue. Michael Germer, the band's guitar player, principal songwriter and vocalist, lives here with Michael Pess, the drummer, and Kase Berke, the bassist. Joshua Grubbs, who plays lead guitar and sings on several songs, divides his time between his parents' place in rural Pennsylvania and the couch in the living room. Germer and Grubbs think they will probably find a place together sometime soon, but for most of the year they have all lived in the apartment together, surrounded by converted bedrooms with bunkbeds and broken windows and eroding on the walls.

Germer and Grubbs have spent much of their time together moving between Austin, Philadelphia and New York—living with friends or in dilapidated dream homes or short term rentals—relocating each time

in an effort to finally find some space to make music or out of frustration with wherever they were or just to save some dollars in the hopes of one day moving to LA. Several years ago, the two moved to South Williamsburg and found a last minute sublet from a guy who was leaving the country to film a documentary. According to Germer, all they had to do was water the plants and pay their next money up front. They did—and then the landlord got sick of the guy going unpaid, and the water got turned off. Germer and Grubbs had to pack up their belongings and leave—nothing was in their van and they didn't want to pay the deposit to get everything turned back on. So, as Germer says, "We just lived without all that shit. We had candles and there was a taikoo Chinese restaurant up the street and we'd drink Coke. I'd take showers at people's houses or at work—you know, those sick showers." Sometime before that, the two lived in a three-story walk-up along Grand Central Terminal. "There was shit all over the floor," says Germer. "I mean, you can't imagine. We saw her the first night and she had just gotten out of a hospital for like three days, she had been raped and sodomized and shit. It was real intense—everyone was running around naked and naked and it was real dark and it felt real dirty."

Mike Pess, Drummer



hated it—nothing in between. Pure rage or pure love."

—JOSH GRUBBS

Vietnam came of age in a post-9/11 New York City that was filled with hubris and despair: Williamsburg was not (quite) yet synonymous with investment bankers in repossessed lofts, and homemade hellicuts and girls who wore boots with shorts still had a bit of edge to them. Vice Records—a new offshoot of the much maligned and adored publication—still had to prove why it existed. The return of New York Rock and electrotrash had both returnees (or new ones, like Germer), and Vietnamese, two guys with guitars playing drums, frenzied and blues-influenced metalhead rock music, was some shit from outer space.

The first Vietnam shows were in and around Brooklyn and sometimes involved up to eight people, including (according to their semi-official bio) a "new media executive" on sex. The very first Vietnam show was Germer and some friends playing under the moniker High Society, opening a show in Greenpoint, Brooklyn (not to be confused with the Ferry Foursomes, high Society didn't last long, but the album "Summer in the City" performed that night, would make its way into Vietnam's catalogue).

Germer and Grubbs first met each other in Austin, Texas, where Germer was graduating from the University of Texas and Grubbs was hanging out,

sometimes taking classes, other times working at a local gas station. "Michael looked really weird, like a mom from another planet," explains Friedberger, who was also a student at UT at the time. "He had this really clean, severe haircut and he would always wear tight black pants and button down shirts." Germer's most well-known mom de luxe was Julius Sensors, under which he played keyboard and sang occasionally for a weird local band called Sensors. "It was a really weird band and I think Grubbs and I thought we were the best band ever," says Grubbs. "I don't like him," he adds. "I think that's most people's first impression: John is kind of like a bitter fruit. You have to get used to him, and a lot of people don't taste things twice; he never backs down—he's completely honest. He would die for you and what you're doing, as long as he feels that it's mutual."

In the Primadonnas and in later bands, Germer performed out-of-stage antics putting televisions running video of his performances on stage in lieu of playing a live set. "I'm just out of a tour now, obviously, so I'm not doing that," he says. "I think what Grubbs was—and still is—the rambunctious wild child, getting into Netflixes and mauling off whatever to whomsoever, whenever. Germer radiates a magnetic calmness, a self-contained tranquility that is at odds with—and a respite

Michael Germer, lead vocals, guitar

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