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(from left) Danny Wagner, Josh Kiszka, Sam Kiszka and Jake Kiszka

## The Fleet Is In...The Studio

**MIDWEST RETRO-ROCKERS GRETA VAN FLEET LOOK TO THE DEBUT ALBUMS OF THEIR HEROES IN VAN HALEN, ZEPPELIN AND THE BLACK CROWES FOR INSPIRATION AS THEY RECORD THEIR ANXIOUSLY AWAITED FULL-LENGTH.**

By Joe Bosso

▶ **"THIS IS GOING** to be a definitive statement," says Greta Van Fleet guitarist Jake Kiszka, discussing the full-length debut album that the hard-rocking Midwestern quartet is busy recording. "Our first studio EP, *Black Smoke Rising*, was kind of a snapshot of where we were at the time, but the full album is going to

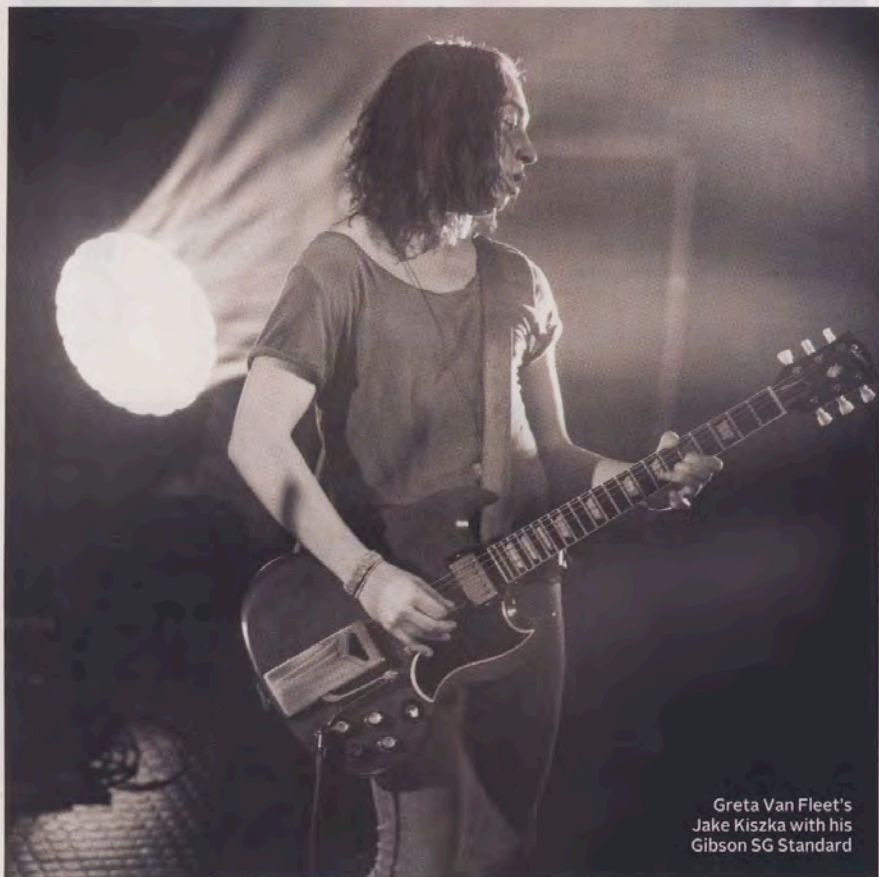
be the real deal. I see it as a big-picture look at where we are now and where we're headed."

Few industry insiders would have predicted that a young group of upstarts from Frankenmuth, Michigan, with nary a turntable or sampler in sight, stood a chance in today's musical climate. But

Greta Van Fleet's infectious brand of high-octane rock, deeply influenced by bands such as Van Halen, Led Zeppelin and Cream, ambushed streaming services and radio with rip-snortin' riffs "Highway Tune" and "Safari Song." Following up such a big splash with an even bigger wave is a tall order, but Kiszka says the band (which includes his brothers Josh on vocals and Sam on bass, as well as drummer Danny Wagner) is aiming high.

"We have certain debut records that are like benchmarks to us—Van Halen's first record, Zeppelin's first, even the →





Greta Van Fleet's  
Jake Kiszka with his  
Gibson SG Standard

Black Crowes' *Shake Your Money Maker*," he notes. "Those records really seemed to sum up each band so well. Those albums are like the gold standard, and they give us something to shoot for. It's like, 'Can we be that good?'"

Kiszka estimates that the band has amassed 30 songs that they plan to record, and then they'll whittle the batch down to the best 10. "There's a few tracks that have been hanging around a while, and there are some we wrote in the last month," he says. "We might focus on the newer songs because they're the freshest. This time, we want to showcase some of our eclectic influences and have more variety—light and shade. We might go from something rocking and super-aggressive into a softer acoustic track."

For some bands, writing new material on the road is often a frustrating endeavor, but Kiszka notes that touring provided a fertile atmosphere for creativity. "It didn't stop our songwriting, but it did change how we wrote," he explains. "A lot of the songs we wrote on tour are more upbeat—we responded to the chaos and the pace. But then there were those moments when you're about to pass out in bed, so you might grab the acoustic and write something sweeter, and that's cool, too."

Greta Van Fleet recorded *Black Smoke*

*Rising* and its companion EP, *From the Fires*, with producer/engineer Al Sutton at his Rust Belt Studios in Royal Oak, Michigan. For the full album, they plan to track the basics with Sutton at Rust Belt before heading down to Blackbird Studios in Nashville for overdubs. Kiszka will once again rely on his trusty trio of electric mainstays (a 1961 Gibson Les Paul, a Gibson SG Standard and a Danelectro) along with a newly acquired Gibson J-45 acoustic, but he's looking forward to combing the music stores of Nashville for new axes. "Oh, I imagine I'll spend some money down there," he says with a laugh. "Nashville is a big guitar town, so I'll pick up a few things."

Looking back on the band's triumphs in 2017, Kiszka says it's hard to pin down a favorite moment ("Our first headline tour sold out in five minutes—how do you top that?"), but he was able to cross one item from his bucket list: meeting rock icon and fellow Midwesterner Bob Seger. "We opened for him on the first date of his tour at Dow Event Center in Saginaw, Michigan," Kiszka says. "We grew up with Bob's music, so we consider him to be a big influence. We snuck in during his sound check and watched him play 'Let It Be' on the piano, and then we got to chat with him. It felt like one of those magical passing-the-torch moments where things just came full circle."