

*Gold Past Life* by Fruit Bats  
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It's the summer of 1973. You're out of school, spending the long, humid days in your tiny hometown cruising with no particular destination in mind. The wind blows your hair back, and the sun wreaks havoc on your shoulders as you pop a cassette into your 8-track player. You press play. As the first notes of Fruit Bat's *Gold Past Life* hit your ears, a version of this image will surely come to mind. The sweet sounds of the past are unmistakable in the Chicago group's latest record, which merges influences, like the music in their parents' cars, with the band's present day pop and poise. As much fun as this throwback is, there is a bite beneath the beauty. This release hits right where it hurts: childhood memories and fleeting moments we wish we could keep forever.

For an eighth studio record, *Gold Past Life* feels like a risk as frontman Eric D. Johnson brings forth new takes on a classic style. It's not imitation, but appreciation. Johnson's work with acts like the Shins and Vetiver influenced the soft, indie-meets-folk-meets-country sound the Fruit Bats are known for, but this record, both in style and subject, is rooted in nostalgia. The title track "Gold Past Life," despite its darker lyrics about thinking back to better times, has an undeniable Supertramp/Electric Light Orchestra vibe to its keyboards and synths. "Drawn Away," with its Buckingham-esque guitar, is fit for 70's AM radio, while "Ocean" is Americana at its finest, soft strumming gently guiding us to the coast and homes away from home. Johnson revives older ideals through stories about spiritual awakening and living a simple life. Still, a desire to "make things stop being so terrible" is just as relevant today.

These themes can make listening to the album uncomfortable at times. The longing that lingers amongst the lyrics highlights the dissatisfaction of holding onto the past; a feeling that Johnson captures impeccably. "Barely Living Room" is a piano-driven ballad dedicated to the ghosts of our past -- lost loves, friendships, and stability. "Your Dead Grandfather" articulates missing those we've lost while accepting that they are gone. "Two Babies in Michigan," an ode to growing up, leaves us with one question as the album comes to its bittersweet end: "Can you remember back to who you were?" Amongst the heartache, a maturity emerges as Johnson's present vantage point allows him to move on and appreciate how far he's come. It seems, with his help, that we can too.

Fruit Bats have created an album that whisks us back and brings us forward. That want to revisit better times is expressed through soft riffs and gentle guitar, yet isn't the overall message in the end. The beauties in our lives present themselves when we take the time to reflect. They are what we

make of them. While *Gold Past Life* sounds like the essential album of the 70's that never was, this record certainly belongs in the here and now. Its striking sentiments are timeless, and meant to be continuously endured.