



Reviews: After five years, Junior Boys prove their relevance on new album

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WIIT STATION MANAGER

It's been 12 years since Junior Boys first took the world by storm with their critically-acclaimed debut, *Last Exit*. The duo were one of the pioneers of the warm, R&B-influenced techno-pop sound that characterizes so many of today's festival lineups and club playlists, and had a run of forward-thinking albums between 2004 and 2011 that are considered by those in the know to be landmark releases for dance pop as a whole. The sound created by collaborators Jeremy Greenspan and Matt Didemus has become an influence for countless current artists, with particular parallels found in Twin Shadow's first two albums and Caribou's latest two, and Junior Boys will almost certainly go down in history as one of the founding acts of this decade's obsession with reinterpreted "indietronica".

That said, Junior Boys' re-entry into the field after a five-year absence comes with a great deal of risk, given that the scenes they helped create have largely caught up to and even moved past the styles the duo crafted early in their career. With a brand new album, *Big Black Coat*, Junior Boys have set out to prove that they're still at the top of their game, and that they can continue to innovate without losing what makes their sound unique. They could have played it safe and let their legacy be what it already is, but instead they've gone back to work becoming tastemakers once again. And for the most part, they've achieved it.

Big Black Coat opens up on one of the most percussive tracks of Junior Boys' career so far, though it may be unfair to attach the word "percussive" to anything on the album. This first track, "You Say That", relies on an eclectic mixture of different drum kit tools for structure, but its underlying tone is



Image courtesy of Junior Boys

pure Junior Boys: shifting patterns of bass and midrange synths paired with conscious, personal lyrics. The songwriting underpinning *Big Black Coat* is based on the concept of the romantic and personal struggles of random men sighted walking around the small city of Hamilton, Ontario, the home of both members of Junior Boys. While this is largely in line with the mood of previous releases from the

group, at times the lyrics of the album seem less genuine than on *Last Exit* or *So This Is Goodbye*, and even border on contrived once or twice. After all, there's only so many times that Greenspan can say the word "baby" before it becomes a writing crutch rather than a real endearment.

Didemus and Greenspan draw from a decidedly retro toolkit to create the sound-

scape of *Big Black Coat*, washing each track in warm, nostalgic synth tones (a composition process which actually helps highlight departures from tradition all the more effectively). Other reviewers have pointed to a strong dose of early Detroit techno present in the mix; I don't have the expertise required to make that assertion myself. What I do know, though, is that the heavy reliance on vintage electronics manifests itself as both a blessing and a curse. Tracks like "M&P" and the transformed soul cover "What You Won't Do For Love" show just how inventive the duo can be with a limited sonic palette, demonstrating their natural talent for music construction. On the other hand, the practically yawn-inducing "Over It" and "No One's Business" get stuck in a bog of disco tropes, sounding akin to a caricature straight out of last year's tongue-in-cheek *Kung Fury* soundtrack. The problem here is that Junior Boys are completely serious in their presentation, and at times their explorations into new genres sound more regressive than reinventive. At 50 minutes long, it wouldn't hurt to cut some of the less compelling filler here and there.

When it comes down to it, though, *Big Black Coat* is not going to be remembered for its more middling compositions. The vast majority of the music on the album marks a turn in Junior Boys tastes toward late Disco and early House, and will be remembered as such. Junior Boys have managed to reunite and make something simultaneously fresh and familiar, something that others pull off rarely. Though it's not going to change the independent music landscape or leave the critics speechless quite like *Last Exit* did a dozen years ago, *Big Black Coat* makes a strong argument for Greenspan and Didemus's continuing relevance and leadership in what has become an increasingly crowded genre. 6.8/10

Players combat truck collisions in 'Clustertruck'

Austin Gonzalez
OPINION EDITOR

Clustertruck is a trucking fun time. This chaotic game is all about not falling off of trucks. Developer, Landfall Games, has been working on *Clustertruck* since September of 2015. These three guys from Stockholm say they focus on gameplay above all else. Based on the success of their equally fast paced multiplayer dogfighter, *Air Brawl*, and party game, *Square Brawl*, I have no doubt *Clustertruck* will be a smash hit as well.

Currently in alpha stages of devel-

opment, Landfall Games is sending out select builds randomly to those who sign up on their website. I received my key after a few days and I've only stopped playing to write this article.

Gameplay is rather simple and intuitive. The basic scheme is WASD to move, Shift to sprint, and Spacebar to jump. Your objective is to reach the end of the level without touching the ground. Sounds easy enough, except for the fact the platforms you jump to and from are erratic semi truck drivers and the world will try to kill you. Whether it's upwards firing pistons, closing crevices, head on colli-

sions, or just uneven terrain, the trucks will go flying and so will you. It's a true *Clustertruck*. The style is decided low-res, as we said earlier, the focus is on the gameplay. I found the controls to be a bit loose (or sloppy), but that may be due to me using a keyboard in place of a controller. Keep in mind this game is still in alpha. By the time the full game is released, I'm sure everything will tighten up.

The full game will include over 100 unique levels, 10 different worlds, an endless mode, in-game level editor, and more! Even in the alpha there are menu slots just to tease you

with the upcoming options and super-powered upgrades you can earn to enhance your *Clustertrucking* experience. I highly recommend heading over to their site <http://www.landfallgamestudio.com/> and requesting a key. There's no risk you'll regret it, because at this point it's still completely free.

Need something to tide you over until you get your hands on an alpha key? Check out Landfall Games' channel on YouTube to watch the game grow and check out newly revealed content.



Images courtesy of Clustertruck

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