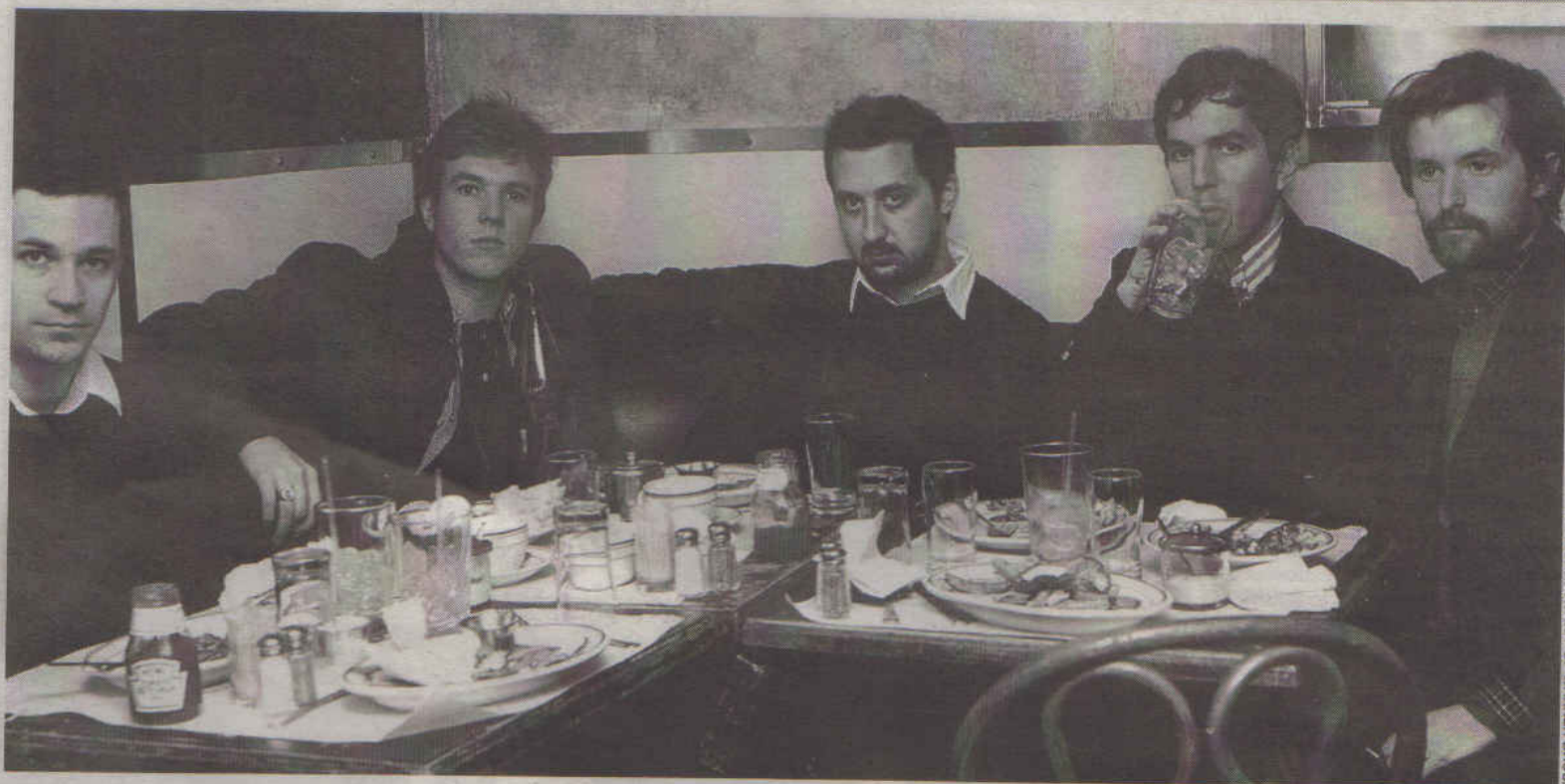


# Points



## The Struggles of The Walkmen

You'd think that the Walkmen would have an easy time writing an album. After all, their music basically consists of scrappy power chords, gut-wrenching wails and some fairly standard beats. But putting together their latest record, *A Hundred Miles Off*, was, to put it lightly, difficult.

"You've got to hammer out these parts that you think you like until they just sound terrible," says lead singer Hamilton Leithauser, still frustrated from the songwriting experience. "The writing didn't go well for about eight solid months. You try and work out new stuff and then you end up just jamming on shitty funk music."

Leithauser is in New York, where he's moving chairs from his practice space to his house. Bassist Walter Martin is getting married in the fall and Leithauser is hosting a party for his right hand man. Besides spending most nights standing on a stage together, the band-mates grew up on the same Washington, DC street. Oh, and they're first cousins.

Their connection goes beyond family dinners, or even jamming together. If it wasn't for cousin Walt, those eight months might have turned into 12. "Walt and I need to work together," says Leithauser. "From January until July we were

trying to get together, the five of us. I don't know why because we've never written successfully like that ever. We just started getting together in little groups. Walt and I started coming up with little parts that sounded good."

It wasn't long after they divided up that Leithauser and Martin wrote a fully formed song, the sweeping "Don't Get Me Down (Come On Over Here)." The rest of the tunes flowed from there, and before they knew it they had an entire album's worth of material.

There are two things you'll notice when listening to the Walkmen's third album: Leithauser channels Bob Dylan more than ever; and there's no song as powerful as "The Rat," the big hit off their second disc, *Bows & Arrows*. The Dylan influence is most evident on *A Hundred Miles Off's* opening track "Louisiana." This rollicking alt-country tune sounds like it belongs on *The Basement Tapes*, and it doesn't help that Leithauser's slurring his words and holding his vowels, just like his favourite artist. "People keep saying that about my voice," he says. "I don't know what happened. I take it as a compliment."

His Dylan impression shouldn't turn anyone off — Leithauser's still the master of the throaty yell —

but fans expecting a second scorching track might be disappointed. "This disc isn't very flashy," says Leithauser. "Both albums had a 'Rat' right at the beginning of the record — that flashy new sounding rock that's going to catch attention. This one's slower to get into, but I think it has more staying power. It's an album you can put on from start to finish and really just like the whole thing."

He couldn't be more right. Both *Bows & Arrows* and their debut disc, *Everyone Who Pretended To Like Me Is Gone*, started off strong, but waned a bit. This album needs time to grow, but just because there's no "Rat" doesn't mean the Walkmen have calmed down. "This Job Is Killing Me" showcases Leithauser's uninhibited scream, and drummer Matt Barrick furiously pounds the skins like he's trying out for an old school punk band. It might not be as catchy as their seminal tune but it does the trick.

Whether or not there's a sizzling song that kicks off the album doesn't really matter to Leithauser. He's happy with the end result, but he's even more ecstatic that there was one at all. "Writing that first song was our triumph," he says. "Finally, we had gotten somewhere and we weren't wasting our lives." *Bryan Borzykowski*