

BANDS 2 WATCH



The Subjects

TWO TEACHERS. TWO STUDENTS. ONE BAND. MEET THE SUBJECTS.

From Sting to Robert Pollard, teachers have always rocked, but few have rocked with their students — until now. The Subjects formed at a New York City private school called Churchill, which favors a nontraditional approach to education. According to its website, the school provides students with “opportunities to succeed in the arts, athletics and hobbies, both in school and after school.” For high school students Jimmy Carbonetti and Matthew Iwanusa and their teachers Joseph Smith and David Sheinkopf, music was the hobby that bonded them in the classroom.

Before playing with their students at a school carnival, Smith and Sheinkopf had been writing and recording what Smith describes as “ironic, heavy metal overtures,” but The Subjects’ sound, which owes a large debt to The Kinks and the last 15 years of indie rock, is a crash course on the garage pep of The Strokes, the Crazy Horse-esque guitar heroics of Built to Spill and the unkempt, ramshackle glory of Pavement. In short, The Subjects are damn good, and it didn’t take long for others to notice as the band started gigging around the city while Carbonetti and Iwanusa were still in high school. Exposure usually isn’t a problem for an upstart band, but The Subjects were in a unique position — trying to get noticed but not *too* noticed. “We’d be out playing until 2 a.m., then see them at school the next day and somehow not let the other kids know,” Smith says. “We told them, ‘You can’t tell your friends.’ It was like *Fight Club* or something.”

Fortunately, Smith and Sheinkopf had taken preemptive measures to assure they wouldn’t get fired if it all came crashing down. They went to their bandmates’ parents, who were all for it if the teachers promised to keep their kids out of trouble. “They just wanted us to be responsible,” Smith says. Soon after, Smith and Sheinkopf went to the school’s administration, starting with the assistant principal, with whom they had regularly traded CDs. Prepared for the worst, they were shocked that she was totally cool with it. “It definitely wasn’t what we expected,” Smith says.

The summer after graduation, the quartet toured outside of New York City for the first time and went to Maryland to record material for a four-song EP, which turned heads, landing The Subjects a write-up in *Spin* and bigger shows.

This summer, they’ll embark on a bona-fide tour in support of their new album, *With the Ease Grace Precision and Cleverness of Human Beings*. While Smith is now “retired” from teaching and has worked a host of odd jobs, Sheinkopf still teaches at Churchill. Iwanusa attends The School of Visual Arts, and Carbonetti works in a guitar store. Though liberated from their sticky situation as a secret student-teacher band, the lessons haven’t stopped. Smith says, “Dave and I told them, ‘This is fun, but you have to continue living your life — you’re not going to make any money doing this.’”

FLIP GRISWOLD