

= Modern Vampires of the City =

Modern Vampires of the City is the third studio album by American indie rock band Vampire Weekend, released on May 14, 2013, by XL Recordings. After releasing their 2010 album *Contra*, the band toured and wrote new material during sound checks. Following a period in which the quartet pursued different musical projects, they regrouped and began work on their third record in 2011. Working with no deadline in mind, the band brought in an outside record producer for the first time, Ariel Rechtshaid.

Recorded at a number of studios and locations, *Modern Vampires of the City* was an attempt to distance the band from the sound they became heavily associated with following their 2008 debut and *Contra*. Broadly experimental, the sound featured on the record is the result of a variety of unconventional recording assets, including pitch shifting. The cover art is a 1966 photograph by Neal Boenzi of the smoggiest day in New York City history, on which the air pollution killed at least 169 people.

*Modern Vampires of the City* debuted at number one on the *Billboard* 200, becoming Vampire Weekend's second consecutive number one album in the United States. It received widespread acclaim and was named the best record of 2013 by several publications, while finishing second in the annual Pazz & Jop critics poll. By December 2014, the album had sold 505,000 copies in the US.

= Background and writing =

The success of Vampire Weekend's second album, *Contra* (2010), established the group as "one of the past decade's great indie rock success stories." By the time the band wrapped their world tour for *Contra*, they realized they had not taken a break in nearly five years. During the break, the band members pursued individual projects: Baio performed DJ sets and scored the Bob Byington film *Somebody Up There Likes Me*, Batmanglij recorded solo material and produced tracks for Das Racist and spent time traveling India with three friends, and Koenig collaborated with Major Lazer. Koenig had broken up with his girlfriend shortly before the release of *Contra* and subsequently moved out of their shared apartment in New York. Feeling "weird and aimless", Koenig attempted to stay in Los Angeles but he returned East after four months.

By the time the band eventually regrouped in 2011, the quartet had amassed plenty of material and made sure to take their time making a new record. Koenig and Batmanglij met several times a week to write songs, some of which they'd later scrap. The pair took a "writing retreat" to Martha's Vineyard, where they bore down and composed several new tracks. Working with no deadline in mind, the band began work on *Modern Vampires of the City*.

= Recording and production =

The songs for *Modern Vampires of the City* were recorded at several locations, including Downtown Studios in New York City, Echo Park Back House and Vox Studios in Los Angeles, Slow Death Studios in Burbank, and the apartment of Rostam Batmanglij, Vampire Weekend's multi-instrumentalist and producer. Early drafts of the tracks "Obvious Bicycle" and "Worship You" were produced at OK Go frontman, Damian Kulash's old house in Chicago, before being taken to an official studio to work on. Batmanglij and Ariel Rechtshaid, the album's co-producer, used a pair of mirrored solid state MacBooks with UAD 2 Satellite Firewire Cards so they could take their recordings anywhere and work on them from separate locations with maximum ease. The band credits Vox Studios with the defining special quality of the recordings, especially the use of their vintage analog tape machines, with Batmanglij remarking, "Much of the overall sound and approach to the album was being able to record the drums to tape on an old Ampex machine." The band wanted a unique drum sound, and so they recorded in a room with high ceilings and had engineer David Schiffman use a "pretty non-conventional drum miking setup" in which a pair of Neumann U 47s were used as over head mics with RCA 77dx ribbon mics

between the Neumanns and the drum kit for added texture . Tape recordings of the drums were then heavily treated and manipulated with Ableton Live plug @-@ ins . Lastly , the band layered samples onto select portions of the drum recordings to accent or shape the finished tone .

Modern Vampires of the City was an attempt by the band to distance themselves from the sounds featured on their debut record and Contra . " Whenever we came up with something familiar sounding , it was rejected " , said Rechtshaid . Pitch shifting was a major component of recording the album . For tracks such as " Step " , drums were recorded on a Varispeed Tape deck set to a lower speed so that they would play back faster and more high pitched . Drummer Chris Tomson would then re @-@ record the drums playing to the sped @-@ up recording to get an uptempo live take . This second recording was then slowed back down to original speed to create an " underwater " effect . The effect is featured prominently on vocals as well . Ezra Koenig 's vocals were run through Eventide H949 and 910 on tracks such as " Diane Young " , with both the pitch and formant shifted changed to manipulate the sound of recorded vocals . Bass guitar was also recorded straight to tape " with a fairly ambient miking approach where the mic was three feet away from the cabinet " . Vocals were recorded with Soundelux U99 Microphones , in combination with 1176 Classic limiter plug @-@ in , Fairchild 670 Compressor and Elektro @-@ Mess @-@ Technik 140 Plate Reverb , giving the vocals a quality Batmanglij described as " buttery " . For guitar sounds , Batmanglij chose not to mic his guitar and instead plugged his Les Paul direct @-@ in to ProTools through a SansAmp Amp Emulation Pedal , a technique used by Jimmy Page .

The band 's main mission was to give each recording warmth , feeling that modern digital recordings lacked the sound quality of older records . In an attempt to make the recordings less harsh , the band and engineers used a spectrum analyzer , Sonnox SuprEsser and heavily automated EQs to edit out harsher , colder frequencies and soften the mix . With the entire band enlisted , the quartet painstakingly listened to the record several separate times using technology from standard commercial iPod earbuds to professional equipment to ensure the record sounded nice regardless of equipment the listener owned . Desiring to " check the relative warmth levels " , the engineers would " go in and perform surgery and automate EQs " in order to make the mixes listenable . The band felt the finished product was something of a third chapter and a continuation of material explored in their previous two efforts . " We thought these three albums should look like they belong together on a bookshelf " , said Batmanglij . " We realized that there are things connecting the songs across three albums , like an invisible hand was guiding us . It does feel like we 've been able to create three distinct worlds for each album , and yet have them be interconnected . "

The title was taken from a lyric in Junior Reid 's 1990 song " One Blood " . Koenig , a fan of the song , found the phrase " Modern Vampires of the City " humorous but also " haunting " as a title for their album . The cover art features an image taken by New York Times photographer Neal Boenzi , depicting a fog @-@ shrouded , dystopian @-@ like New York City . Boenzi took the photo atop the Empire State Building in November 1966 , when the city was plagued by a smog problem . Because of the subsequent rise in global air pollution , the band chose the photo believing it may have rendered " some kind of future " .

= = Music and lyrics = =

Modern Vampires of the City is a departure from the percussive , African @-@ influenced indie pop of Contra . Batmanglij said that the album has a recurring tension that distinguishes it from the band 's previous albums : " Even if the songs are mostly in a major key , there ? s something that ? s hanging out there that ? s a little bit dark . And I think that ? s reflective of the world . " According to Heather Phares of Allmusic , the album eschews the eclectic music of Contra for " a less audacious production style and smaller instrumental palette : guitar , organ , harpsichord , and the occasional sample combine into a rarefied sound that suggests a more insular version of their debut " . She pointed to how the album is bookended by the stylistically narrow chamber pop on the songs " Obvious Bicycle " and " Young Lion " . " Step " was inspired by a lyric from Souls of Mischief 's 1993 song " Step to My Girl " , which sampled Grover Washington , Jr . ' s cover of Bread 's " Aubrey " .

The vocal melody of the chorus interprets the melody of " Aubrey " so close that the band had to clear it as a sample . The chorus vocals were recorded in Ableton Live using the onboard microphone in Batmanglij 's MacBook Pro . Alexis Petridis viewed that some songs echo lesser known " musical tropes " from the band 's previous albums ? a mock Irish folk influence is heard on " Unbelievers " , while " Step " features " Left Banke @-@ inspired baroque pop " .

Much of the lyrics were composed by Batmanglij and Koenig in Batmanglij 's apartment ( a former factory building in Brooklyn ) and at a rented cottage on Martha 's Vineyard . The lyrics explore more mature , world @-@ weary themes such as growing old and disillusionment with American foreign policy . The album eschews the theme of privileged youth from their first two albums in favor of characters with adult responsibilities and reflections on the passage of time . Faith and mortality are recurring themes on songs such as " Unbelievers " , " Worship You " , and " Everlasting Arms " . Koenig likened their first three albums to *Brideshead Revisited* : " The naïve joyous school days in the beginning . Then the expansion of the world , travel , seeing other places , learning a little bit more about how people live . And then the end is a little bit of growing up , starting to think more seriously about your life and your faith . If people could look at our three albums as a bildungsroman , I ? d be O.K. with that . " According to Brice Ezell from PopMatters , *Modern Vampires of the City* is " very much an indie rock record " because of Koenig 's voice and diction , which reveals " the youth that he and his bandmates so often strive to shrug off . " Ezell asserts that , on songs such as " Unbelievers " , the " reckless abandon " expressed by the lyrics reveals " the group 's grasp on the genuine rebellion that indie rock ought to strive for . "

= = Release and reception = =

*Modern Vampires of the City* received widespread acclaim from critics when it was released on May 14 , 2013 , by XL Recordings . At Metacritic , which assigns a normalized rating out of 100 to reviews from mainstream publications , the album received an average score of 84 , based on 51 reviews . In *The Independent* , Simon Price called it Vampire Weekend 's " most cohesive and convincing effort yet " featuring their most accessible compositions , while Ryan Dombal from Pitchfork Media said the singing suited the music fluidly on songs that sounded more natural and dynamic than the band 's previous work . Alexis Petridis , lead critic for *The Guardian* , believed Vampire Weekend successfully avoided the gimmicky sounds of their previous albums and wrote more genuine lyrics dealing with mortality rather than " arch depictions of moneyed young Wasp lives " . Rolling Stone magazine 's Nathan Brackett said the album featured a particular spirit and songcraft evocative of urban life , while Robert Christgau appreciated how many twists the coming of age themes revealed . In his review for MSN Music , Christgau found the record similar to the Beatles ' Sgt. Pepper 's Lonely Hearts Club Band ( 1967 ) because of how each lyric and musical element was " pleasurable in itself and aptly situated in the sturdy songs and tracks , so that the whole signifies without a hint of concept . "

In a less enthusiastic review , NME magazine 's John Calvert felt Vampire Weekend sacrificed " the sonic smarts that made them " on an otherwise " gorgeous album " . Greg Kot , writing for the *Chicago Tribune* , said the band occasionally missteps with attempts at ingenuity on songs such as " Ya Hey " and " Finger Back " . Slant Magazine 's Jesse Cataldo said the songs may be dense and wordy , although he also found them " immediately potent on a purely visceral level , striking a perfect balance that makes for what 's perhaps the best album of the year " .

In the first week *Modern Vampires of the City* was released , it debuted at number one on the Billboard 200 and sold 134 @,@ 000 copies in the United States . It was Vampire Weekend 's second consecutive number @-@ one record on the Billboard 200 , as well as the nineteenth independently @-@ distributed album to top the chart in the Nielsen SoundScan era ( 1991 ? present ) . The album entered the UK Albums Chart at number three with first @-@ week sales of 27 @,@ 805 copies in the United Kingdom , becoming the band 's third consecutive top @-@ twenty album there . By December 2014 , it had been certified gold by the Recording Industry Association of America and sold 505 @,@ 000 copies in the US .

== = Accolades == =

Modern Vampires of the City appeared on many critics' year @-@ end lists of 2013's best albums . It finished second in voting for the Pazz & Jop , an annual poll of American critics published by The Village Voice . At the 2014 Grammy Awards , the record won in the category of Best Alternative Music Album . According to Acclaimed Music , it is the 218th most ranked record on lists of the greatest albums of all time .

== Track listing ==

All lyrics written by Ezra Koenig , except where noted . All music composed by Rostam Batmanglij and Koenig , except where noted .

== Personnel ==

Credits adapted from the album's liner notes .

== = Vampire Weekend == =

Ezra Koenig ? lead vocals , piano on " Unbelievers "

Rostam Batmanglij ? piano , guitars , banjo , vocal harmonies and backing vocals , drum and synth programming , keyboards , shaker , lead vocals on " Young Lion "

Chris Baio ? bass

Chris Tomson ? drums

== = Additional personnel == =

Ariel Rechtshaid ? additional drum and synth programming on " Obvious Bicycle " , " Unbelievers " , " Diane Young " , and " Hudson " , additional bass on " Everlasting Arms " , production , engineering

Jeff Curtin ? additional drums on " Diane Young " , engineering

Brendan Ryan ? accordion on " Unbelievers "

Johnny Cuomo ? fiddle on " Unbelievers "

Danny T. Levin ? trumpet on " Unbelievers " and " Hudson "

Elizabeth Lea ? trombone on " Unbelievers " and " Hudson "

Seth Shafer ? tuba on " Unbelievers " and " Hudson "

Adam Schatz ? saxophone on " Diane Young "

Angel Deradoorian ? backing vocals on " Obvious Bicycle " , " Worship You " and " Young Lion " , additional vocal arrangement

Fanny Franklin ? backing vocals on " Finger Back "

== Charts ==