



Daniel Lorca (left), Matthew Caws and Ira Elliot are happily indie.

#### Music Feature

Nada Surf tries softer sell

New York alt-rock trio overcome the urge to bash it up

Bryan Borzykowski

**NADA SURF** at the Opera House (735 Queen East), Monday (April 7), 8 pm doors.  
\$16.50. 416-870-8000.

Nada Surf knows a thing or two about irony. In 1996, the New York-based trio had a massive hit with the shoegazing alterna-anthem *Popular*, only to find themselves dumped in the major-label garbage bin just two years later.

Somewhere along the way, Nada Surf turned into the nauseatingly popular high school kids ridiculed in their own song. They were those successful football dudes everyone pretended to like, but when it came down to it, no one really did.

What the band didn't sing about then is that people grow up and change – even those annoying jocks – and realize that being the greatest kid in class wasn't all it's cracked up to be.

“We just couldn't believe how things had gone from zero to 60 and then just faded really quickly,” says drummer Ira Elliot, recalling their major label days. “It was frustrating, but in the long run it brought us back to where we wanted to be in the first place.”

They're back to being a respected indie rock band that keeps improving with every album. Like their last couple of records, *Lucky* (Outside Music) is a mellow affair loaded with strong songwriting, measured riffs and infectious hooks. It's a far cry from the frenetic rockers the band churned out in the mid-90s.

“As time goes by we feel that the need to play a particular way lessens,” explains Elliot. “We have slowly been letting go of the urge to bash it out.”

Getting in touch with their softer side is partly a product of their age – late 30- and 40-something. It also had to do with letting go of their “popular” years and trusting their own musical instincts.

“It was really heartbreaking,” says lead singer Matthew Caws. “You could see that this momentum we had was just totally defusing. It was raining on our little candle. But that’s the good thing about maturity: our songs over the years just opened up.”

“Playing hard and fast, it’s like being a comedian who doesn’t like dead air,” adds Elliot. “Stopping and breathing, doing as little as you can – it’s a hard lesson to learn, because we’re scared.”

They honed their breathing skills during live performances, and in 2001, on the critically acclaimed *Let Go (Outside Music)*, the new Nada Surf emerged. While it didn’t sell tens of thousands of copies, the album’s laid-back aesthetic and focused pop songwriting garnered the group a ton of new fans and made old followers take a second look.

Now, two albums later, Nada Surf’s popularity is skyrocketing again. But don’t expect them to sign to another major any time soon.

“No way,” says Caws. “You need to have a shot at selling a million records to even make anything. And we’ve already done it.”