I caught up with NE-HI at The Blackheart, shortly before their set at the CLIF Bar Bash. The Chicago-based quartet falls somewhere in the intersection of post-punk and psychedelic garage rock, and certainly lived up to their reputable energy on stage. We got to chat about a myriad of absolutely pressing topics, from which neighborhood band they're going to beat up, to Hot Tub Time Machine origin stories.

Emily Beiser: Hey guys! Should we start by everyone introducing themselves and telling me what you’re most excited for at South By?

Mikey Wells: I’m Mikey, barbecue’s cool. And bands.

That was kind of a wishy-washy answer!

Alex Otatke: I’m Alex. I’m excited to see Gucci Mane.

MW: And Modern English!

Jason Balla: I’m Jason, and I’m most excited to play.

Games?

JB: The shows... it’s all about the shows! And of course to see some buddies. I’m excited to see White Reaper.

So, in a parallel universe where you didn’t start making music together to score a friend’s film, how did NE-HI form?

AO: Probably in some sort of Hot Tub Time Machine.

JB: It’s our favorite film. But also, we probably would’ve been on a ski trip and we all get inside this hot tub, accidentally spill a radioactive energy drink in it, and it would’ve taken us back to the ’60s to form The Byrds.

What are your thoughts on Hot Tub Time Machine 2?

JB: Not as good, but it’s... you know. We want Cusack back.

Who’s been your favorite musician to come out of your hometown?

JB: From Chicago?

Yep, the Big Apple!

JB: Definitely my most formative would be Tim Kinsella, Joan of Arc- who’s playing here.

AO: Currently, I would say Deeper.

JB: I also really love this band The Hecks.

MW: I like Dim. Shout-out to Bill.

JB: Bill made our album’s artwork, also.

Speaking of your hometown, how do you think the Chicago music scene has shaped your sound?

JB: We learned that being down to earth and working hard are key, and friendliness, which really doesn’t seem to be in a lot of music scenes. Everyone’s friends. We all help each other.

Is Noisey’s claim that you’re the “nicest boys in the Midwest” true?

JB: That’s for you to answer.

I think you’re the meanest boys ever.

JB: No! But we got that tag and now we’re trying to rebrand as the biggest bad boys.

Maybe get a Whitney hoop?

JB: A Whitney hoop?

Yeah, the boys of Whitney seem to have the piercings to give themselves a little bit of an... edge.

JB: Nah, they’re soft as fuck.

They are very, very soft.
MW: We’re gonna kick their ass!
AO: Yeah, we’re gonna kick Whitney’s ass, at South By. They’re not here, but...

You heard it here first!
JB: Yeah, let them know. Those are our buddies, but we’re willing to throw down the gauntlet.

What do you think you’d be doing right now if you were not in NE-HI?
MW: I’d be ja- a janitor.
I thought you were going to say something else that started with “ja…”
MW: Oh… jacking off?

everyone laughs
AO: That’s a tough question. Probably not doing most things different, I guess just not be precisely here right now.

Not in Austin.
AO: Nah, I’d probably be shoveling our driveway.

Who was the most embarrassing band you listened to when you were younger?
JB: There are so many… my most embarrassing would be some sort of pop-punk/emo situation.
AO: Hawthorne Heights.
JB: Yeah, they were my first concert.

I used to have a Metro Station rubber bracelet in middle school.
MW: Oh, cool.
No, it’s literally just not cool.
JB: That was Miley Cyrus’s brother, right?
Yeah!
JB: They’re like “it’s getting so warm in here…”
MW: I don’t know them?
What?!
AO: This interview’s over.

Yeah, for real. Is there something that none of you can seem to agree on? I know you all agree on Miller High Life being the champagne of beers...
JB: We do?
MW: Where’d you hear that?

Through the grapevine. Maybe I hallucinated it.
AO: No, it’s true.
JB: Our big hot topic in the van lately has been what constitutes a meal.

What’s been the consensus?
JB: It’s pretty divided. Some people say it’s a portion, others say it’s a variety of at least three different ingredients.

What do you think it is?
JB: I’d say it’s a portion.
I also think it’s a portion.
AO: Because pizza can be a meal, but it’s just one thing.
JB: But the variety of ingredients thing…

What was the last text each of you sent?
JB: “Ok”
MW: I sent a picture of a Broncho to my girlfriend. She really likes Ford Bronchos.
AO: Mine was “Awesome, did you guys have time to mix?”

Did they respond?
Did they mix?

AO: Yes!

Did they mix?

AO: No!

In your opinion, what's the most annoying thing a person can do when they're attending a concert?

JB: Start playing their own set. It's so annoying. It happens so often, it's really terrible. You know, they just start setting up their drums on the floor while you're playing...

I've never been a fan of when people have their iPads out in the front row and they're, like, recording the entire set.

AO: Oh, that's super lame.

JB: I try not to care too much about people being on their phones. Even though it's totally bullshit, it doesn't really bother me.

Any shout-outs?

MW: Shout-out to Stone Cold Steve Austin, The Texas Rattlesnake. Great to be in his home state, drinking his beer.

JB: Everything really is bigger here.

MW: Shout-out Sonic Zombie. Euthanize me baby!

AO: Yeah, shout-out to Sonic Zombie. They just recorded at MINBAL; also, shout-out Doug Malone.

JB: Hi mom!

Cool, so what can fans expect from NE-HI in the remainder of 2017?

JB: Lots of shows!

MW: A workout tape.

P90X?

JB: Kind of! Maybe, like, a slacker version of P90x. Do you wanna sort of get chiseled?

I love it. Thanks for your time, guys- I'm pumped for your set!

All: Thank you!

NE-HI's sophomore LP, Offers, is out on Grand Jury.

Photo credit to Bryan Allen Lamb