



# Life, Love & Dessert

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## MUSIC: FEATURE

### The Velvet Teen



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### STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE

By [Omar Perez](#)

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It's no secret that hard times result in better music, and the same goes for The Velvet Teen. "We're still struggling, which is good in some ways," says bassist Joshua Staples. "People who are cushy and live comfortably don't always make the best art."

While the trio may not hold day jobs anymore, going out on the road without the financial security of nine-to-fivers has proven to be a challenge for the growing band. Still, hard times don't reflect in The Velvet Teen's polished pop serenades. On its recent *Elysium*, delicate, pretty melodies float on a beam of trickling pianos and orchestral lullabies, with Judah Nagler's lilting falsetto, which is often compared to that of the late Jeff Buckley, hovering above it all.

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Back in Santa Rosa, California five years ago, The Velvet Teen started out as a side project called The Secret Band, whose name came from the anonymity its members wanted from their existing bands. The affair turned into a full-time gig. After releasing an Internet-only album and a three-song EP, VT signed to Slowdance, releasing 2002's *Out of the Fierce Parade*, recorded by Death Cab for Cutie's Chris Walla, who became a mentor of sorts for the band.

Initially looking to sign to a major, the band was courted by several conglomerates after their debut effort, but changed its mind during discussions, deciding to remain on the smaller label. "We maintained an ethical stance that we believe in," Staples said, unswayed by the prospect of larger distribution if it meant less artistic control.

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Part of that decision was due to Death Cab for Cutie's DIY ethos, which the band embraces.

"They're role models for us," Staples said. "Ethically, artistically, we model ourselves after what they do; we admire what they do and how independent they are."

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