

As crafty as a Fox

► Robin Pecknold on the long preparation of Fleet Foxes' beautiful album, 'Helplessness Blues' ► And on why there are so many fruits in his songs

Fleet Foxes singer Robin Pecknold has made no secret of his struggles to overcome the dreaded "sophomore slump." After the folkie Seattle combo reached critical acclaim with their self-titled debut in 2008, it seemed that topping that effort would be difficult. But with "Helplessness Blues," it seems they have indeed done it. The songs are confident, richly acoustic and full of the energetic introspection that seems to hit artists hardest

studio. So that's been good. It's not like we had the songs all worked out live before we recorded, so this has kind of been our first chance to get to know them in some ways.

Were there any challenges in making that jump?

We had to rehearse for almost a month just to get all the parts down and all the chord changes.

Any surprises as far as the crowd response goes?

We open the show with the instrumental from the album. It's kind of funny that people are like, "Yeah!" for this little, small instrumental song. And there's this one line in one of the new songs where I really push

my voice, and after that line in "The Shrine" people are always like, "Yeah!"

There are a lot of fruits blossoming within the lyrics of these songs.

My grandpa was an orchardist in Wenatchee, which is in Washington. It's sort of a big apple-growing region. There's kind of an apple and orchard iconography up at the cabin. He's passed away now, but me and my brother Sean just go up there and work on stuff together, and there's a lot of stuff up there that's apple related and there's Yeats poems on the walls.

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in their twenties.

Pecknold has said the reason that it took so long to write and record the follow-up was his picky nature, which even led to him scrapping recordings the band had reportedly spent several thousands of dollars on. But it has paid off.

How does it feel to finally take these songs from the long incubation process of writing and recording to audiences?

It's been good. It's been good to have the chance to sort of make the songs more physical and less cerebral. You can kind of play louder or have it sound huge without feeling like the sound is too big and without the kind of hemming and hawing about what you're doing in the

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► Fleet Foxes play with the Walkmen at the Williamsburg Waterfront in Brooklyn on Saturday. For more info, visit www.ticketmaster.com.

