



SHOLI'S

Mathematical Mind

AFTER A FEW YEARS of recording in cavernous old houses in San Francisco and Davis, California and doling out 7-inches and EPs in the northern California area, post-rock trio Sholi have become Quarterstick's latest signees, with their self-titled debut landing February 17. Delivering a cascade of sweeping yet often indistinguishable instrumentation and sublimely repetitious lyrics amidst a layer of samples of their own live recordings, the group's penchant for cultivating complicated tracks with dreamlike sounds betrays their humble beginnings. Though vocalist and guitarist Payam Bavafa's personal inspirations can get quite complicated.

I know you put out a 7-inch on college station KDVS's record label. How did you get involved with the station?

Well we were actually all there as students at one point, and we had friends who worked at the radio station. I'm not sure exactly when and where but I think we've all had our hands in station events. It's a really big part of the community. KDVS always has its hands in the shows that are being put on, at some of the houses in town and at the few venues that Davis has. They have people constantly turning us on to weird experimental bands between the cracks of towns like Davis across the country. I had a friend, Andy Pastalaniec, he just came up with the idea of turning the radio station into something more because they were so involved with the community. They thought it'd be cool to take some of the recordings from the live KDVS sessions that they have and turn those into CDs or records to put out because they were just sitting in the back library... thousands of records and all these cool live recordings. Andy was telling me he had the first recorded anything of Pavement cause they're from Stockton, not too far away. I guess their first live show was on KDVS—but don't hold me to that fact, that's hearsay! The station decided they wanted to be the first university radio station to put out records and they just did it. So he was just telling me that this was the plan and he was super excited about it and he'd love to put out our 7-inch if we were into the idea.

You also put out a 7-inch of covers: Joanna Newsom's "Sprout And The Bean" and a Googoosh song, "Hejrat." What made you choose those tracks?

It was November of 2007, I think, and it was a time of escalating rhetoric between Iran and America. And I was just thinking about... people who had come to America after the Islamic revolution and how they maintain a sense of cultural identity living abroad. I think a lot of what they relate to is still the images and the sounds and the stories from their homeland. Some of them had to move because they had to close down their record shops... things that became illegal in Iran after the changing government. I think a lot of the imagery and sound and story of [Iranian diva] Googoosh presents that idea of the expatriates that came over. It was a very ambitious project, but on a very specific smaller scale I thought it'd be kind of unique to expose this Iranian icon to an audience that might not know about her. I thought people who would be into [Newsom's] type of music would also be interested in Googoosh's music and people who were interested in Googoosh would be interested in Joanna's song and our interpretation of it.

STORY BY

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More recently, how did you get involved with [producer and Deerhoof drummer] Greg Saunier?

Well, when we had a few songs together and had ideas for the album I just talked it over with [drummer] Jon [Bafus] and [bassist] Eric [Ruud] and I just kind of came up with a list of people who would be ideal people for us to work with, who would understand our music or know how to get the sounds we want.

You didn't know him ahead of time?

No, we didn't know him like that. We sent an e-mail to like four or five people, and he was like our top choice. So we sent him a link to some demos we recorded and...you know, he wrote back, and he was interested. It was pretty funny because as we started working on the record it was over e-mail while he was touring through Europe, and we just started getting feedback on those demos. We chatted through e-mails like, "Where the F# goes to the C, you know, do this, maybe cut this part out," just giving really specific feedback. I think he has perfect pitch too so he can hear the chords and transcribe it in his head. So we continued working with him when he came back... And then Greg kind of encouraged us to send the record to some labels. So we sent it out to a bunch of people and we just waited for awhile. We played for a couple labels. And then I think it was sometime late spring we got a call from Howard Greynolds from (Touch And Go imprint) Quarterstick and he was just like, "It was only after the third or fourth listen that I finally got it. Blah blah blah... it's amazing! I want to put out this record." It was really cool because Touch And Go is one of my favorite labels.

"I worked in a neuroscience lab... They basically put electrodes on your head and... record your brainwaves."

Did you really have a mad scientist-style job?

Yeah, I worked in a neuroscience lab. That was during the time that I had moved to San Francisco from Davis. They basically put electrodes on your head and while they played you a stimulus in your ear or a flashlight in your eye or while you're sleeping, they record your brainwaves. My job was basically to process the brainwaves and use this kind of complicated mathematical technique they came up with for processing the data. I think some of that work definitely influenced what I was thinking about when I was writing some of those songs. It was more the idea of how we process memories. There's like a certain process of selective recollection. Your vision of history is always going to be very much shaped by what you choose to remember. The record covers a lot of territory; it's not like specific to memory or anything like that.... Part of what we were trying to do with this music was impress repetition and reflection... But in the end it's more of just a song that's got a long intro, verse, chorus, verse, repetitive structures and melodies that you would remember in the same pop sense that you would in a lot of music.