

# CRAWDADDY!

## THE MAGAZINE OF ROCK

### Reviews: Sholi

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by Angela Zimmerman



Sholi  
*Sholi*  
(Quarterstick, 2009)

I can best articulate my experience with the music of Sholi by wrapping it in metaphor, likening it to being afloat on a clear green sea that is at times stormy and contentious, drifting beneath clouds casting dark grey shadows on an aimless traveler. The softer moments are those that give the album its quiet inner strength, the introspective, wistful times when tranquility prevails... like serene ocean waves. The turbulence protects and safeguards that inner tranquility, releasing the tension that brews deep within a dreamy and overactive state of mind. I'd say that how one chooses to approach this record is an indication of how one likes to dissect their music. Broken down into parts or swallowed as a whole, *Sholi* is a testament to the human experience as seen through the eyes of

musical perfectionists. The melodies are soft and haunting, the lyrics intrinsically profound. The arrangements are delicate but the strength within each song is foundational. This is magnetic, beautiful, dark, cerebral, and dense stuff. But *Sholi* is also, fortunately, accessible, opening itself up as a conceptual album to listeners who strive to interpret their music in such a way, but the songs also stand on their own, each a singular presence in itself.

*Sholi* was recorded over two years ago by Deerhoof drummer Greg Saunier, but then the band took the tracks home and polished and perfected them for a year. So, reasonably, *Sholi* is an intricately crafted album, evading the weight of extraneous noise, words, or filler. Seems as though every note and chord, each sequence and lyrical line sung by songwriter Payam Bavafa, are inherent parts to a calculated whole, like, say, efforts by arty contemporaries such as Radiohead or Sonic Youth. It's an experimental record, but most certainly a rock album, managing to be angular but also florid and seamlessly fast-moving. *Sholi*'s propulsive but graceful rhythm section, helmed by bassist Eric Rudd and the fantastic drumming of Jonathan Bafus, ushers the meanderings of Bavafa's guitar noodling and wistful, beautiful vocal to a deliberate, triumphant end.

*Sholi* invokes a sense of mystical intrigue, but above all, it's a tragically human album. Bavafa's lyrics are rich and metaphorical, broaching themes like loss, memory, perception, anguish, discomfort, and joy, from the dreamy, heartbreaking opener, "All That We Can See", with the line, "Oh my, can she conceive of this break without breaking" to the brisk and irregular "Tourniquet." Though it kicks off brash and jagged, it awesomely picks up into a rollicking groove, as Bavafa sings, "This wound has seen too much tonight / Take this light away." The following "November Through June" begins with hymn-like organ chords and a pretty guitar sequence, and then gets dark, hard, and serious as it explores the notion of loss and isolation. The philosophical "Spy in the House of Memories" is the thematic anchor of the album, expressing the danger and difficulty of selective memory: "Take your mind / It's not wanted here / We decide what we cherish and what we forget / We leave on the other end."

"Any Other God" is soft and warm as it roams and sparkles, casting the album in a tender moment at this forlorn juncture. Bittersweet memories of a lost love, Bavafa sings, "I fell in love this one time / It was beautiful we / Were young and so quietly walking along / Bathed in the filth and the warmth / Ours would not be let down / Something that could not be touched / Existed when we did not." The album ends with the dark and brooding "Contortionist", a song about deception and reality... a somber way to go out and leaving me unsettled, which essentially just makes me want to go back to the beginning and experience the whole thing again. And that's definitely a noble feat for any album.

*Sholi* is a metaphysical journey exploring the vastness of human emotion and personal experience. It's mercurial and shape-shifting, challenging but hugely rewarding, as the best kinds of experimental post-rock should be. As *Sholi* takes to the road to promote this record, it will be interesting to see how such polished and perfected music will be translated live. But for a studio effort, it stands as solid as they come.

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