



SHOLI: SHOLI [QUARTERSTICK]

By Reed Fischer on February 19, 2009 10:42 AM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

Sholi dares to dream while rocking out

Avant-rock trio Sholi released an EP last year titled *Dreams Before People*, and the band's self-titled debut shows a similar affinity for the opaque messages and visions we receive in our sleep. Although the San Francisco group previously covered both Joanna Newsom's "Sprout and the Bean" and "Hejrat," a hit for Persian pop star Googoosh in the 1970s, with a light touch, this new collection of songs brings out blacker, discordant tones. Singer-guitarist Payam Bavafa, who logged a year and a half poring over brain-wave data in a neuroscience lab, imparts foreboding fragments of scenes, conversations or feelings in disturbingly vivid detail. "They separate us in these rooms / suffocate the deep / eat the self consumed," he sings in fragile falsetto in "November Through June." These Thom Yorke-tinged stanzas breed panic with what is implicitly said, but also with what lot is left to a nightmarish imagination.

Ratcheting the tension is Bavafa and bassist Eric Ruud, picking minor chords for their alternations between quiet noodling and full-out roars, never letting any arrangement gather moss. Deerhoof's powerful drummer Greg Saunier, who produced the project, got some of the album's most head-spinning moments from Sholi drummer Jonathon Bafus. His free-jazz percussion on "All That We Can See" evokes everything from raindrops against a window to whirring machinations, and is reminiscent of the schizophrenic creations legendary stickmen such as Sunny Murray and Jack DeJohnette once channeled through their fingers. The album's best-crafted moment, "Out of Orbit," rises from Ruud's sludgy bass, and frenetically builds as Bavafa unleashes post-apocalyptic imagery with unwelcome clarity: children burnt to a crisp and feathers falling like bombs. "I know, I know it's rhetoric tired / but all the unconcerned need a melody to smooth and average / numb and nullify," he sings, as a melody achieving the thrilling exact opposite comes to a close.

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