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AEM052 Redbird Fever

Jan 7, 2010

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People form bands for all sorts of reasons. Some bands begin with a concept or gimmick, others are driven by a thirst for self expression, while others still are born from egotism, curiosity, political motive, chance, or even boredom. **Redbird Fever**, a three-piece indie rock band based out of western Washington state, was born from a challenge. In February of 2009 **Ralph Hogaboom** (guitar, vocals, glockenspiel) decided to participate in the February Album Writing Month challenge at www.fawm.org by writing fourteen new songs. It can't be easy to write fourteen songs in twenty-eight days-I've never been able to write more than a couple in a month-but Hogaboom managed to pull it off and after the month was up, he took his songs to **Jay Wainman** (violin, vocals, melodyhorn) with whom he'd been jamming for several months. The pair entered the studio in May and spent two full days pumping out as much as they could. First Hogaboom recorded drums, guitars, and vocals and then Wainman layered on violin, additional vocals, and a collection of instruments she had brought with her. Conrad Uno (Presidents of The United States America, Fresh Young Fellows) mixed it on the spot and, as Hogaboom reflects, *"we took it home dazed and confused and not really knowing if we even liked it yet."* The product of these sessions

was the six-track EP **Come Away From Your Home** (available for download on this site). Perhaps Hogaboom and Wainman couldn't see it because they were stuck in the thick of it, but it only took me one listen to tell that they had created something special.

In July, **Hogaboom** and **Wainman** recruited drummer **Michael White** to flush out their sound and enable them to perform live. White's jazz and metal influence made for an interesting addition, completing **Redbird Fever** lineup. But as I mentioned previously, Redbird Fever was born from a challenge. That's not only a comment on Hogaboom's decision to write an album's worth of material in the shortest month of the year, but also a comment on the makeup of the band. *"It's pretty easy to be in a band with three sweaty guys, yelling your way through power chords. When we decided not to have a bass player, much of that was driven by the challenge that presents. You have to work your way through a song idea differently when you can't count on that thick bassline to bring it back in from a drum break, for example. So you wind up structuring things in less common ways, and we're finding that much more interesting and satisfying right now. The same is true of melody, with our violin. We use the violin as a melody, on top of the music, which challenges the vocal melodies to try to rival it if they're going to get the attention in your ear. It's a tension in the music, I think, and there's a certain appeal in that tension."*

Redbird Fever combines quirky pop sensibilities with a healthy experimental vibe. Their songs are short and snappy (the longest track on their EP is only 2:47) and remarkably unpretentious. As they explain it, *"spiraling violin and vocal melodies offset looped, angular guitar riffs and dynamic lyrics about loss, heartache, and alienation."* That's all true enough, but there's a charm to Redbird Fever that extends beyond that, something that one can't put a finger on so easily. It might have something to do with the intimacy of the lyrics, which seem more like fragments of a bedside conversation or a stream of consciousness than something premeditated. Or maybe, as **Hogaboom** suggests, it has something to do with the interplay between violin and vocals. Or maybe it's the subtle tension between **Wainman's** and Hogaboom's vocal melodies, usually in unison but diverging at key moments. Or perhaps I've missed it entirely. I'll let you be the judge of that. It's time to press play on **A-side "It's a Metaphor, Dear!"**

7... 6... 5... 4... 3... 2... 1...!!! Lately, **Redbird Fever** has been opening their shows with this song and having the crowd help them count down. **Hogaboom** explains, *"when we hit one and start the song, there's a really nice sharing that happens with us and everyone who was counting."* **"It's a Metaphor, Dear!"** is the perfect opener. A percussive guitar riff and peppy violin melody kick things off with gusto while the refrain takes on a more pensive air. A heavier riff-based outro gives the band a chance to build. As advertised, "It's a Metaphor, Dear!" is an extended metaphor. *"I think that I would like to live in her heart it may sound stupid but i'd have to bring both my cats. Maybe it'd be better if I were a red blood cell, flow through her aorta and down through her left ventricle."* But the mere act of declaring the song a metaphor adds a sarcastic

twist, as if to say it's a metaphor for a metaphor. Certainly, it's not to be taken at face value. Hogaboom explains, *"it's about love, but it's got this insincerity wrapping it up"*

As I keep asserting, **Redbird Fever** is a band that likes to push itself, and nowhere is this more evident than in **B-side "Sometimes Things Get Broken."** The band explains that *"[it] started out as an experiment, trying to challenge ourselves to do a song with no musically separate chorus, and try to make it apparent using mostly vocals."* It's a test they pass with flying colors. The beautiful vocal harmonies on the title line, *"sometimes things get broken,"* help it to rise above the mix but when **Hogaboom's** and **Wainman's** voices diverge on the word *broken*, with Hogaboom cutting it short and Wainman continuing on, the sense of togetherness literally gets broken. In another instance, Wainman sings *"don't tell me 1 and 1 make 1 again"* while Hogaboom shouts bitterly over her, *"it's subtraction, it's addition,"* evoking a conflict between lovers. Although "Sometimes Things Get Broken" lacks a distinct verse/chorus structure it's musically quite progressive. Unusual textures like handclaps and whispers help keep things interesting on this track.

Redbird Fever plans to enter the studio again in early 2010 to record a full length album. In the mean time, they will be performing, the next show scheduled at 4th Ave Tav in Olympia, WA on January 23rd. And February is right around the corner. Would it be too much to hope for fourteen new songs?

Its a Metaphor Dear



0:00 / 1:43



Sometimes Things Get Broken



0:00 / 2:38

