

Duotang - bass, drums and that's about it

As soon as I heard that Duotang was a duo with one member playing bass, the other on drums, I made the inevitable jump that they were going to sound just like The Inbreds. In fact, I thought that they were just copying The Inbreds to try and pick up some of their popularity. Sigh. Of course, I now find my cynicism a little on the embarrassing side as I was fortunate to catch their live show in Halifax, and so I can say (with my hand on my heart) that they sound absolutely nothing at all like The Inbreds. And they are much sharper dressers too.

In the summer of last year, Rod Slaughter (bass) and Sean Allum (drums) formed Duotang in their hometown of Winnipeg. During the last twelve months, they have built up quite a following simply on the strength of their live shows which fall into the 'near legendary' bracket. After self-releasing their debut single, they jumped onto Vancouver's Mint Records and released what must be one of the best singles of the year so far - 'The Message'. That was followed by an equally impressive album (*Smash The Ships And Raise The Beams*), so the days of comparisons to that other band must surely be behind them now.

Right after they came off stage at Halifax On Music, Rod, Sean and myself huddled into what can best be described as a very small cupboard to carry out one of the more 'intimate' interviews I have ever had the pleasure of conducting.

So who exactly is Duotang?

We're a pretty new band who hadn't really left Winnipeg, but then we got signed to Mint Records and we've started touring in the last couple of months. This is the first time that we've come past Montreal though. It's a little intimidating really playing at Halifax On Music with all these other bands because we are so new.

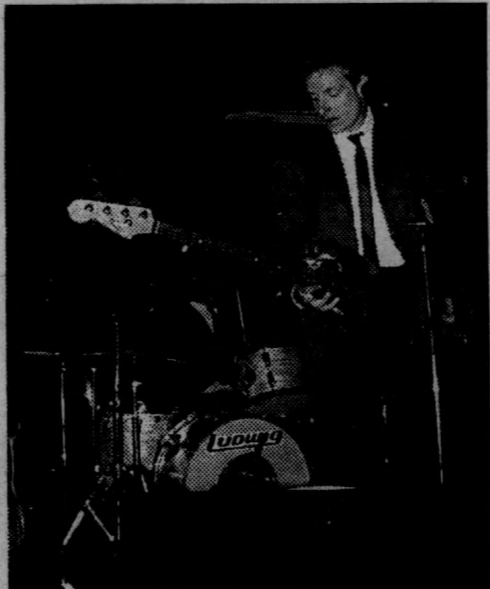
There's another band that you get compared to because of the whole 'two-members-playing-only-drums-and-bass' thing - I won't mention their name, but I'm sure you know who they are. How do you feel about that?

Well, I vary between nonchalant and rather perturbed because there are so many three-piece bands who not only have the same make-up, but also sound exactly the same and nobody mentions that. Anyone who compares us has probably never heard us. I can see why we do get compared - there aren't very many two-piece bands around. When we started up, we hadn't even heard of The Inbreds but now we have, and they are a great band, but they sound completely different than us.

So why is Duotang a two-piece band - why can't you be a normal band?

Originally, it was because nobody else would play with us. But now, we just really like the sound, and we really can't think of anything else to add - we might flirt with keyboards occasionally, but we don't want another full-time member just now. We like the sound, so why should we add another member just because people tell us there is another band with two members? People might think that being in a two-piece might be limiting, but it is the other way around - it doesn't limit us at all. This way we can add some other instruments when we want, but we're not stuck with a third member all the time.

You very much play a bass like a bass rather than use any tricks to disguise it. I use a lot of distortion but, otherwise, it is



The almighty live presence of Duotang

pretty bare bones. We try to get the songs to sound as minimal as possible and still have a song behind it. You can make an interesting sound with next to nothing - all you need is a melody and a hook. Think of Hayden or Broken Girl where there is just an acoustic guitar - I wonder if they get asked "why are you by yourself?" all the time. Probably not.

You even slipped a Beatles cover into your set - is that a brave or foolish move?

It was one of the things that started the band because we used to jam Beatles and Who songs, and we thought that it was such a happy version of 'She Loves You' that we had to throw it into our set - we get a kick out of it.

Are you not afraid that people might take offence at your trying to do The Beatles?

It seems to work for us because people think we're just two guys trying to hack it out on stage - it makes people laugh a little bit or sing along. We do have a recording of it, and at the end where it goes "With a love like that, you know you should be glad," it sounds like *The Beatles at The Hollywood Bowl* because the recording is so bad. So we just put the real Beatles on at the end and it sounds kind of funny. We might put that out on a compilation album or something.

How is the deal with Mint working out?

Originally, we thought it would be a goal of ours to be signed to a label like Mint or Murder or Sonic Unyon - those labels in Canada are just as good as a major because they work so hard and still retain a lot of quality. And now we are with Mint, we're surprised at how professional and hard working they are too - it is so good to think that there is someone sitting in an office working 14 hours a day just so we can get some promotion and PR work. They've also opened up all kinds of doors for us too in the States, and in places in Canada where majors just wouldn't be welcomed. They are very good at what they do. And it does feel like a family because all the bands are great - we've already toured with The Smugglers, and we're going on tour with Cub. Everybody tries to help each other out and that's so important when you're the new guys.

Selected Discography

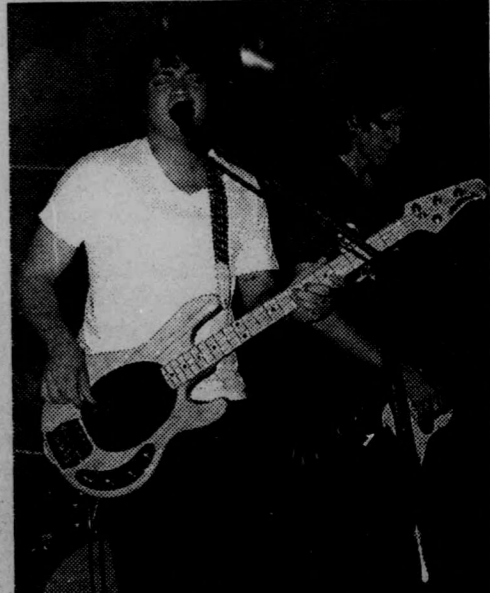
1996 - *Smash The Ships and Raise The Beams*

(released on Mint Records)

The supersonic soundscapes of Sianspheric⁴

Anyone who attended Halifax On Music probably had at least one conversation with Steve Peruzzi, the lead singer from Sianspheric⁴ as he appeared to attend every single show, and moved about the masses with such a level of enthusiasm that it was impossible not to be affected by him (and that's without mentioning just how damned friendly he is). Yet on stage, he gets so wrapped up in his music that he closes his eyes and just gives in to it.

Sianspheric's debut album, *Somnium*, was a real anomaly in the Canadian music scene since it didn't really sound like anyone else (particularly not Bryan Adams). Released on the very cool Sonic Unyon label, it propelled them into the limelight both in Canada, and more recently in the US where they have more than risen to the occasion. Not only did they turn in another wonderful live performance at the festival, but Steve actually stopped talking to everybody else long enough to talk at length about Sianspheric⁴ and their music - no big deal for someone who is so very sincere about all music.



Sianspheric⁴ get lost in music at Fredericton's Dock

The sound that the band has is very reminiscent of the early days of such British bands as Slowdive, Chapterhouse and Ride, yet it seems to be almost unique in Canada...

And also The Jesus And Mary Chain with that high end noise.

...and the songs are long and meandering - why did you pick that kind of sound?

Well, it wasn't predicted or anything, it's just how we write music. And that isn't the kind of music we all listen to either - I like really rocking music like Jane's Addiction - but it's how we express ourselves. And the songs don't follow the usual verse-chorus thing either. We might have the chorus then the bridge and that's it, or we reverse things altogether and have the chorus at the beginning. It's hard to explain. We play with song structure, and it seems to work.

Is there a large degree of improvisation in your work?

Every night is different for the guitars. The structure might be two of this, and one of that, so every night sounds different. That's the beauty of it; you could never make the same painting twice even if you wanted to - you could get pretty close, but never quite the same. Different things happen and the guitars fall off. Whatever.

The album's been out for quite some time now. Are you sick of still playing the old stuff?

I don't want to play those songs anymore. I still like the old album, but it's not really us. We've changed a lot since then. We're becoming a lot more focussed and squeezing things down a bit, but we do still have the same kind of sound. We do wear our influences on our sleeves like The Verve and My Bloody Valentine, but we don't copy them exactly, we put it all together into our own sound. The drums and the bass have to be right up there, but they have to be really simple to leave a path for the guitars.

I love the way that some songs build up slowly until at the very end, everything just merges together into one sound where you can't really distinguish between instruments.

We try to make a wall of sound where you can't see where anything is coming from, but you can just picture it. Sometimes it means we have to get the soundman to turn the vocals

down, but I don't mind because I've never really been all that into vocals. I'm a bass player first. The music has always been more important than the vocals to me. But vocals are cool too.

What about a new album? It's been a while...

We are making a new album right after we finish this tour, so it will be out next March. It's going to be more extreme, either more chaotic or more mellow. I was just talking about this today where I want to get everything together on one album, like the new Beck album, or Radiohead's last album where it just blows their other albums away. We want to do that on the next album - make it a lot shorter, but more intense. We would never put out an album shorter than 45 minutes since our songs need to be a bit longer. If they are too short, it's like getting half a picture, we need the development.

Do Sonic Unyon look after you well?

They are so cool because all their bands are so very different. There are metal bands, there are pop bands, there are space rock bands - there is everything. I think they are a very respectable label who knows everything that is happening so we can't complain about that. We're very happy on this label, and I want to release at least four albums here. I look at it like a Sub-Pop - it's there, but it isn't really appreciated yet. I like to think long term, so when people tell us that we've got it together, I tell them that we haven't yet. Maybe in five years.

So what is the five-year plan for Sianspheric?

Basically, to always top our last album, even if it takes us three years, we'd never put out a crappy album. And keep our head on straight too. I mean, I love Oasis' music, but their attitude is just too much to take. I don't even think that it is Noel - he's a genius - but his little brother Liam is just a jerk. I like sincerity in music. There are bands like Mojave 3 who are just starting over again, but they are so sincere in what they do.

Selected Discography

1995 - *Somnium*



(released on Sonic Unyon Records)