

ROSE WINDOWS

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Words by Frank Valish

By 2009, guitarist/songwriter Chris Cheveyo found himself in a rut. Solid Gold Eagle, the post-rock instrumental band that he started two years earlier in his hometown of San Antonio, TX had reached the end of the line. He had recently moved to Seattle with the band and spent a few thousand dollars recording an album that he hated and later scrapped. The band broke up. Cheveyo carried on writing alone until a drunken evening with friend Rabia Shaheen Qazi led to an unexpected turn of events.

"I don't know what we were thinking, but we were at this street corner on Capital Hill, and she was just screaming at people, like a madwoman," says Cheveyo, his calm, affable presence punctuated by infectious laughter. "Then she started singing 'Summertime' by Billie Holiday. I was there with another friend and we both just turned around and were like, 'What? You can sing?""

Within a week, Cheveyo had persuaded Qazi to sing in a new band, gathering his two Solid Gold Eagle bandmates and rebranding themselves Rose Windows. Within four months, the band played its first show, and soon after, what had become a seven-piece—Cheveyo, Qazi, bassist Richie Rekow, rhythm guitarist Nils Petersen, drummer Pat Schowe, pianist/organist David Davila, and flutist Veronica Dye—was in Seattle's Avast! Studios recording a self-financed debut LP, *The Sun Dogs*.

The Sun Dogs is an expansive album filled with extended arrangements and prog leanings, interweaving Black Sabbath-like riffs with elements of Eastern music. The latter grew out of an obsession that began with Cheveyo's investigation of Jeff Mangum's Bulgarian field recordings on Orange Twin Field Works: Volume 1 and grew into an admiration of music from places such as Thailand and northern Africa.

"You listen to their music and they were playing soul and R&B like we were, just mixed with their own cultural music," says Cheveyo. "When I heard that, it was eye-opening..... Melodically I was being taught that you could break all these Western rules."

After creating a Kickstarter campaign to raise money to finish recording, Rose Windows eventually signed to Sub Pop at the behest of producer extraordinaire Phil Ek, who was in and out of the studio while the band was recording. Sonically, the album is a throwback to early period Genesis or King Crimson, but with a heavier kick. Lyrically, it's equally intriguing.

"I wrote a lot about religious oppression," says Cheveyo. "That's something that Rabia and I went though a lot. I had harsh Christian parents, and Rabia was raised fundamentalist Muslim. I'm eight years older than her, and it's still a struggle. As a generation, we went through our own war, and I thought that was important to talk about. I like that in the'60s there were a lot of people who sang about Vietnam. It was real art. It was representing the times, like telling history, and completely relevant, so I wanted to add elements of that. Classism. Cultural appropriation. Those were a lot of things we visited. I tried to root the themes into that, and add hope into that in the end."



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