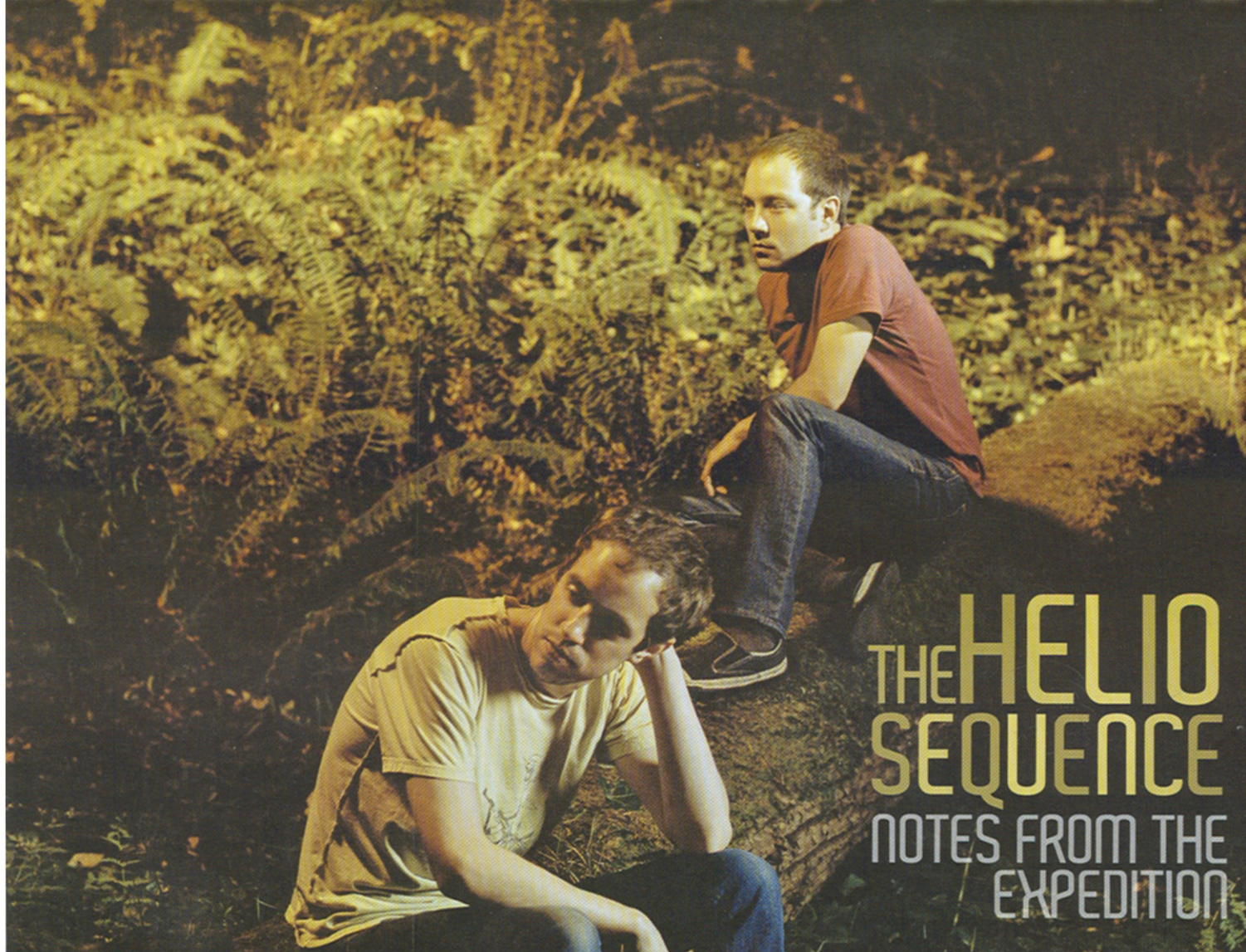


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PERFORMER



THE HELIO
SEQUENCE
NOTES FROM THE
EXPEDITION



The Helio Sequence

by McKibben

The Helio Sequence is Brandon Summers and Benjamin Weikel. They are musicians. They are artists. Their art is music. Their music is meticulously layered with airy orchestration and a swift undercurrent of pop sensibilities creating a sound of ambient electronica juxtaposed with singer/songwriter sheen. "Love and Distance" is the latest effort from The Helio Sequence. It is at once brimming with a bright & sunny turn-your-stereo-up-while-at-the-stoplight-with-your-windows-down-to-let-the-blonde-in-the-convertible-next-to-you-and-any-passersby-that-you-are-hip hipness while simultaneously possessing a subcutaneous (although not subverting) darker edge. If their music were a pattern, it would be paisley. If their music were a moment, it would be quarter till five on a Friday. If their music was a film, it'd be directed by Wong Kar-Wai. If their music was a book, it'd be written by Pynchon. If their music was music, it'd be crafted by The Helio Sequence.

Brandon and Benjamin recorded the album over a year's time. During that span, Benjamin lent his drum kit to Modest Mouse, recording "Good News for People Who Love Bad News" and all the subsequent tours that Modest Mouse went on, with The Helio Sequence opening on some shows, doubling the drumming time for Weikel. Unlike their previous two albums, "Com Plex" and "Young Effectuals", which were recorded in a room at the musical instrument store where they

worked, "Love and Distance" was recorded in various locations ranging from Brandon's apartment to Benjamin's parent's basement to the garage of Isaac Brock (of Modest Mouse). The album, like the two before it, was recorded, mixed, and produced by the duo. Unlike the two before it, "Love and Distance" was not a translation of their live performance intensity captured on tape. But like the two prior to it, it is an album of beauty and grace.

"Love and Distance" was recorded in a multitude of locations. Do you think that the transitory nomadic recording process benefited the album?

Brandon: In the end, for what our goal was for this record, it ended up helping. It was a difficult way of doing things in constantly trying to find a place to record. Our other two records were recorded in one place and had a more straight-through feeling and unified sound. For this record, we were going for a collection of songs, concentrating on each song, letting the album be dictated on a song-to-song basis. We'd ask, "What does this song want? What does it need? What is the feeling?" Changing around to different places really helped that. Being in different places means being in different frames of mind. Some of the vocal takes were done in my apartment when Ben would be on tour with Modest Mouse for a bunch of weeks at a time. I set up the studio here and laid down a lot of the vocal takes which I thought were scratch takes but ended up becoming finals. There's a totally different feeling when you're doing things in your own space, especially in a very personal place. And then there was Isaac's garage, which was kinda weird cause we'd never really recorded in anyone else's space before.

Benjamin: Every place that we went to was a really good environment to be in, unlike the at the music store. We worked there and our boss wasn't excited about us recording there so we had to hide what we're doing a lot of the time. And so it was definitely cool to have different places where we felt we could make noise and have the freedom to do whatever we needed to do.

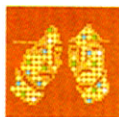
The crux of your live performance is in your intensity and volume. How did you translate your live performance into your recording process as you've done in the past?

Brandon: This album has been a reverse process. I think you can hear it in the songs. They fell together really uniquely. "Harmonica Song" was completely conceived live, written live, and we attempted to capture that live intensity as we've done before. Other songs grew of bits and pieces. Benjamin would have a keyboard song written out and we'd take that and build a song around it. So it would be an additive process of finding an arrangement, like "S.O.S." Some written initially as lyrics and then piecing a sound around them, which is something we had never done before. "Blood Bleeds" is a case of that. They all fell together differently. "The People of the Secret" was a highly collaborative process. Ben and I would do as much as possible and then pass it off. I take it and do what I could, and then he'd take it, and then I'd do some over dubs and then he'd splice it and mix

THE KEY TO BEING A GOOD SEQUENCER BAND IS SHEER VOLUME.

THE HELIO SEQUENCE

Love and Distance (Sub Pop)



For a self-recorded duo from Portland, Ore., the Helio Sequence have a glorious oversized, and overstuffed, sound. Dotted with wheezing harmonicas, Morse-code Casio blips, and trippy guitar spirals, *Love and Distance* has enough hooks to fill the next NOW comp. "This is an S.O.S.," Brandon Summers pleads at one point, though in reality these studio tinkerers need no help at all. **B+** —ME

AMPLIFIER

The Helio Sequence

Love and Distance
Sub Pop (subpop.com)

It's been a little while since anyone last heard from the Helio Sequence, as the Portland, Oregon band's last album, *Young Effectuals*, was released way back in 2001. The time in between albums was spent touring, experimenting, playing in other bands, such as Modest Mouse, and listening to all sorts of music. Those three years of intensely varied experiences have greatly impacted the work displayed on *Love and Distance*, the band's most inventive release yet. The album includes elements of straightforward pop, melodic rock, dirty blues, groovy funk, spacey atmospherics and every sort of thing you would expect to find bouncing around in between. Organic instruments find themselves playing an enchanting game of cat and mouse with the synthetic ones, and it isn't often that you hear acoustic guitar strums, haunting keyboards, blazing harmonicas, throbbing bass grooves and a number of other live and electronic elements congealing this well. What makes it all the more impressive is the fact that this is the work of just two people, Brandon Summers and Benjamin Weikel. The duo samples from a broad musical palette, yet you'll be surprised by how cohesive and inviting the end results are.

—EDDIE FOURNIER

SPIN

The Helio Sequence

Love and Distance



If you're going to crossbreed Built to Spill and the Flaming Lips, then you might as well have fun doing it. The Portland, Oregon duo of Brandon Summers (open-throated whine, plink-and-shimmer guitar) and Benjamin Weikel (drums, kitchen-sink keyboards) have a dense, playful, wide-screen sound that means to overwhelm, and often it does. **B+**



THE HELIO SEQUENCE

Love And Distance

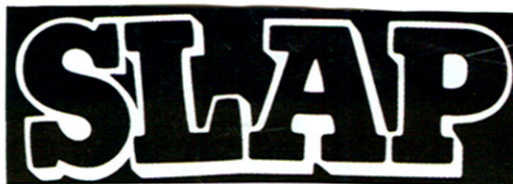
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Ride with them.

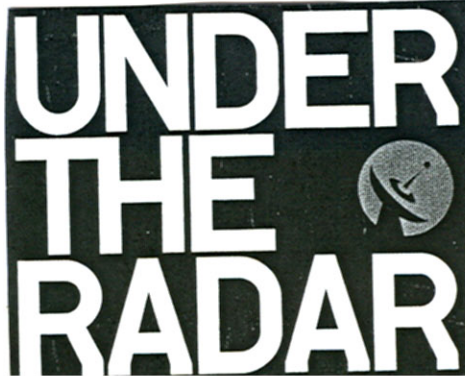
Love And Distance is about three songs too long, two band members too short, and one substantial

trip from the era that it so naturally belongs (that being the British shoegazing scene of a decade ago). But within an album that otherwise makes you think in reverse, the group's core musicians (Benjamin Weikel on drums, Brandon Summers on everything else) positively push forward, blissing out with an educated northern soul and a highbrow glide-guitar jones that finds them creating their own space in time. Sorry, dudes: A penalty must be taken for writing a fuzzed-out harmonica lead, then naming the track "Harmonica Song." (Sub Pop; subpop.com) Trevor Kelley



The Helio Sequence
Love and Distance

The '60s, '70s, and '80s are back again in a good way via (Sub Pop) a Telecaster, a bouncing drummer, programmed loops, and an honest to god vocalist. This is The Helio Sequence and on their latest effort *Love and Distance*, singer Brandon Summers and drummer Benjamin Weikel take us back to previous decades while keeping us aware of the profound impact computers can have on music when done so with control. Overall, *Love and Distance* gets a major boost from its loop tracks yet still manages to feel natural a la Brandon's surreal vocal style and Benjamin's transcendent drumming. When Helio Sequence is in the zone, there is no stopping them, especially live. And no, these computer sounds are not a crutch to lean on for any lack of talent nor are these North Westerners jumping on the recent trend of electronic induced rock. "We've been doing this for 10 years," Brandon Summers says. *Love and Distance* is a seamless journey though the conventions of what has made rock great over the years while sounding fresh, original and modern. —Dan Masek



The Helio Sequence

Title: TBA

Due: TBA

"This record won't sound like [our previous albums]," promises The Helio Sequence's Brandon Summers. "We're both very, very focused on the sonic quality of this record having depth, space, and detail."

Portland, Oregon's The Helio Sequence (also featuring Benjamin Weikel) proved themselves while still in their teens with their debut, *Com Plex*. Three records on, it's time to start mixing it up. Still in the early stages of their fourth full-length, Summers says the differences this time started at the beginning. "After we finished this summer of touring we decided that we would 'part ways' for a bit and work on writing separately," he explains. "We both have computer and recording setups at home and access to our studio, so we each set to writing and recording demos of songs and song fragments. The goal was to get all the ideas out, whether they are complete songs, sketches, chord changes, parts, phrases, or even just sounds that are interesting. Benjamin has over 90 keyboard song ideas and I have over 40 guitar songs ideas."

With ideas in place, at the time of this interview the duo were self-recording in their new studio. "We've been building our own little recording studio in a practice space building called Suburbia, in Southeast Portland," says Summers.

According to Summers, at least two different directions have already taken place for the record. "There may be an acoustic, organic element to the record. Also, Benjamin has just begun to use a variety of different keyboards and is really interested in low-bit resolution textures."

By Marcus Kagler

Album reviews



HELIO SEQUENCE • LOVE AND DISTANCE

Ignore the constant My Bloody Valentine comparisons you've been reading about the Helio Sequence. It's a tempting analogy for the songs on *Love And Distance*, but the aesthetic of the group's third LP is kaleidoscopic rather than overwhelmingly dense. "Harmonica Song" is both earthy and futuristic, a reverb-heavy union of Air and My Morning Jacket. As keyboards twinkle like ice under a warm sun, guitars squeal, arena-ready drums keep time and guitarist Brandon Summers howls like John Lennon back from the grave. (Yes, it features Summers playing the titular instrument.) "Let It Fall Apart"—all rat-a-tat drums, soothing vocals and pulsating synths—is the musical equivalent of floating on clouds. These two songs are an accurate snapshot of the dichotomy at work here, as the Helio Sequence alternates between danceable, hippie space jams and sleepy chill-out tunes, all shot through with a healthy dose of psychedelia. Not only essential, *Love And Distance* is like nothing you've heard this year.

MAGNET caught up with Summers and drummer/keyboardist Benjamin Weikel in their hometown of Portland, Ore.

Love And Distance took more than a year to complete and was recorded under less than ideal circumstances.

Weikel: I got the call from Modest Mouse to play (drums) with them. That made it very difficult. It was pretty much back and forth on a daily basis, but they knew I was going to be loyal to the Helio Sequence. I've known Brandon forever and he's been my best friend, so it wasn't going to be a situation where I just bailed to make a little money.

I think the recording sounds very professional, considering your do-it-yourself approach.

Summers: A big part of our band is the recording aesthetic. We're essentially gearheads. It's a learning process. We've always really liked pop music with the nasally, clean, shiny recording. We don't want it to sound like a vintage this or vintage that. We want it to sound really modern and really good. That's the reason it took a year to do this.

Weikel: I really learned a lot from recording the Modest Mouse record (*Good News For People Who Love Bad News*).

There's a lot going on in your songs.

Summers: I like albums that you can listen to over and over again. I just picked up John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*. I've been listening to it on repeat for the past week, but I still feel like I'm not getting all of it.

The Helio Sequence is tough to categorize. What's the worst comparison you've heard?

Summers: I think people use the My Bloody Valentine comparison because they can't describe the music. One of the things we concentrate on is texture, and obviously My Bloody Valentine has amazing texture. Both of us love My Bloody Valentine, but it doesn't go beyond that. There have been some funny ones. King Crimson meets Tears For Fears. The Beach Boys meets Pets Shop Boys. [Laughs] It's always "someone meets someone." [Sub Pop, www.subpop.com]

—Matt Ryan


The Helio Sequence
Love and Distance
 (Sub Pop)

The third album by the Helio Sequence starts with a serving of red herrings. "Harmonica Song" opens *Love and Distance* with an industrial dance-rock groove, a born-to-be-wild refrain and—yup—raucous harmonica. The six-minute tune would hardly need a remix to be dance-club fare, but it's not very characteristic of the record. These ten songs are a canny union of synth-pop and indie rock, combining the former's propulsion and hook appeal with the latter's melodicism and slacker tude. In "Let It Fall Apart," singer-guitarist Brandon Summers advises, "Call off all of your

plans / Push back all of your worries."

Summers and his musical partner—keyboardist, drummer and sometime Modest Mouse member Benjamin Weikel—have done nothing of the sort. The Portland, Oregon, duo recorded *Love and Distance* in such smells-like-lo-fi locations as "Isaac Brock's garage," but the results aren't fuzzy or flimsy. Perhaps conceived as a transition from the noisier style of the band's previous outings, the album cools down as it progresses—yet it never sounds as if it's about to fade away.

By the time the Sequence reaches the closing "Looks Good (but You Looked Away)," the harmonica has become a muted backdrop, while fingerpicked guitar, cooed *do do dos* and chimes have come to the fore. The tune isn't a mere wisp, however. If *Love and Distance* is a passage from the disco to the chill-out room, it's one undertaken with a steadfast dedication to songcraft.—Mark Jenkins

The Helio Sequence plays Northsix
Tue 13.



THE HELIO SEQUENCE

About a year ago, I went to see The Helio Sequence at the request of my best friend. He said, "Emily, I love this band! When they come to Seattle [my current city of residence], you have to go see them. Do it, I promise you won't regret it." As I highly respect my friend's musical taste, I went to see the band to appease his pleading. I really had no idea what they sounded like, or what I was truly in for, so I went into the evening with only one request for the group: Impress me. And I must say, it turned out to be a lovely and magical evening. The Helio Sequence, comprised of Brandon Summers (vocals/guitar) and Benjamin Weikel (keyboards/drums), summon the ghosts of other ethereal groups like The Birthday Party and My Bloody Valentine, by riding the wave of white noise while dancing on the wake of shimmering pop vocals. It is an odd yet endearing mixture of reverb and catchy choruses, of bopping and shoegazing, but the duo blend styles so effortlessly that you don't hear the musical differences, but only feel the aural synergy glide through the ear drums. That evening in Seattle I posed an ultimatum to The Helio Sequence: Blow my mind. And oh my trippy, dreamy stars—they rose to the challenge.