

The Helio Sequence

Keep Your Eyes Ahead
Out on January 29, 2008



Brandon Summers was disenchanted at a time when he thought he'd be anything but. Following two epic, self-produced albums on Portland's Cavity Search, The Helio Sequence had just released *Love and Distance*, the duo's shimmering 2004 debut on Sub Pop. Brandon and best friend Benjamin Weikel were traversing the country with their impressive collection of synthesizers, pedals, guitars and massive amps all jam-packed into a brand new tour van (a two-seater obtained during Benjamin's stint as the drummer for Modest Mouse). And heck, the pair had even left their day jobs at their hometown music shop in Beaverton, OR. After eight years of playing together (they met when Brandon was in middle school), The Helio Sequence had finally arrived. But after six months of tours in the U.S. and Europe with Blonde Redhead, Modest Mouse, Kings of Leon, and Secret Machines, Brandon's vocal chords were severely shredded. When he lost his voice in the midst of the first batch of these dates, he was bummed but made the best of it [enter the whiskey]. Halfway through, though, he could hardly speak—let alone sing—and literally had to stop talking during daylight hours. To kill the boredom of forced silence during the day and the frustration of dissatisfying performances at night, he polished off 60 books in about as many days, beginning with Bob Dylan's *Chronicles*. Upon returning to Portland, Brandon's doctor forbade him from singing for almost two months. "I really hit the wall," he recalls, "Going into 2005 I actually had to think, 'If I lose my voice, what will I do?'"

Trading whiskey for Throat Coat®, Brandon taught himself vocal exercises and mic technique. He took up jogging and vowed not to be another lazy musician; from that point on, recording and practice sessions were to begin at 9am sharp. In light of such devotion, it's not surprising The Helio Sequence regrouped and went on to record their most dynamic, extraordinary work to date. *Keep Your Eyes Ahead* marries the duo's signature layered keyboards and impossibly big guitars with crisp songwriting and a newfound appreciation for minimalism. The finger picking on "Shed Your Love" is backed by exquisite strings and ambient noise, but Brandon's serene, self-assured delivery remains front and center. While songs from the band's early releases spanned up to 7 minutes, even the longest, lushest, catchiest track on *Keep Your Eyes Ahead* (fiery anthem "Hallelujah") clocks in at 4 and a half minutes, evidence of just how refined their craft has become. Beyond the health regimen, Brandon's brush with silence helped him deconstruct and refocus his approach to expression. Lyrics increasingly became stream of consciousness. Vocals were recorded spontaneously in bedroom closets and living rooms, which may explain the haunting urgency you hear in Brandon's voice, especially on driving tracks like "Keep Your Eyes Ahead." The band also took its time on the album. After the bulk of official recording was completed, a listen through all the demos and snippets on Brandon's hard drive convinced Benjamin there were more gems in the rough (which is how both "Hallelujah" and "Keep Your Eyes Ahead," as well as the mid-tempo "Back to This" were rediscovered and retooled).

The collective wisdom of Wikipedia currently describes The Helio Sequence as "indie electronica" (bonus points to whoever fixes that one). One listen to *Keep Your Eyes Ahead*, which was self-produced by the duo and then mastered by Greg Calbi (Iron and Wine, Interpol, and Paul Simon's *Graceland*), confirms The Helio Sequence team with an energy and a range that continues to defy such narrow categorization. Unapologetic pop and folk meld seamlessly to create songs that are bigger, more epic and polished than anything they've ever done. *Keep Your Eyes Ahead* is the sound of a band and a decade-old partnership that's been invigorated. And that's exactly how the songs will make you feel: invigorated.