

Unwasted Youth: Planning the Rebellion, "Planning the Rebellion"

Written by

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There's a look that passes between brothers Robert and Scott Cerny when I interview them. It's merely a glance, but in that split second, they've communicated which of them will answer the question.

That insular fraternal bond might explain why the two left their old band - Unburdened - and formed the techno-rock duo Planning the Rebellion. "Usually, we don't agree with other people," said younger brother Scott. But they're most definitely on the same page.

The duo - 19 and 18 years old, respectively, from the Quad Cities, and roommates at Northern Illinois University - released a self-titled debut late last year. It's shockingly mature and assured, particularly considering that the Cernys solicited no outside feedback - from friends, parents, producers, or engineers. "No one heard it until it was done," Scott said.

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They recorded at home, plugging the instruments into a laptop, and spent months figuring out how to translate the multi-layered bedroom recording into a live setting. They played their first show at their alma mater - Sherrard High School - in mid-December and later that month performed at Mojo's in the River Music Experience.

They might actually consider Planning the Rebellion a trio, because they need a third member to execute the songs live. "Sometimes we give a part to the computer," Robert said. "We don't give him any solos," Scott added.

The music is surprisingly extroverted given its creation - accessible and tuneful, with an organic texture that's hard to achieve in music built from electronics. That's not to say that it sounds like analog instruments - the beats and keyboards are obviously synthesized - but *Planning the Rebellion* is grounded by Robert's breathy, expressive vocals, and the music is never too brassy or manufactured for the desired effect.

Robert said they call the music "electronica rock," but the brothers sound uncomfortable with the label; whatever they attach to the music generates associations that they'd prefer to avoid. "We like to be vague because we don't really know," Robert said.

They clearly drew inspiration from Radiohead and, in particular, singer Thom Yorke's solo record from last year. They cited Yorke's self-doubt about his CD and related it to their own insecurities about *Planning the Rebellion*. "It could be interpreted as a strange record," Scott said.

And Robert added that he fears that listeners won't fully appreciate it: "They're not going to hear all you've put into it."

That's true with most any labor of love, though. The best sound natural and effortless, and only reveal their complexity on close inspection.

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Planning the Rebellion doesn't have the depth of art, but it's a well-executed and varied debut full of sonic richness. There are moments of cheese endemic to techno-heavy music, and lyrically it's generically confessional, but those are sins of youth and budget. The Cernys know how to write, arrange, fill out, and record a song, and their skills are matched with a vision and a confidence. They have an ear for drama, tension, escalation, and release - all critical to the success of music that's so naked, unable to hide behind rock-star poses or distortion.

The CD's opener, "Whispers in the Dark," is simply stellar and could be a Pet Shop Boys song, with its club beats, layers of bright synthesizers, and singing full of yearning and memories. It's a dream a computer might have.

The propulsive next song, though, merely has techno accents, focused instead on piano and Robert's singing, wistful with hints of bitterness or anger, like Summer at Shatter Creek on serious uppers.

That's followed by "Waiting for You," which aspires to be an emo anthem but lacks the necessary muscle. The guitars are articulate but too muted and thin for a rock song - more a fault in the production than the execution.

The band excels when it embraces its electronic elements fully. The instrumental title track pairs an appropriate level of rock electricity with sensitive piano and atmospherics, recalling Nine Inch Nails' "Just Like You Imagined" with its hard-rock grandeur heavily processed and translated into keyboards and beats.

Already, Robert and Scott are talking about their next recording, and they're restless with their sound. They said that they admire bands that grow and change - they mention Radiohead again - yet somehow retain a signature sound.

So you can expect Planning the Rebellion to evolve, but my guess is that they're going to stick around; the brothers Cerny sound serious about music.

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And although college will keep them busy, they are looking for Quad Cities shows, and they seem earnest about improving. "We can do better," Robert said.

For more information on Planning the Rebellion, visit (<http://www.planningtherebellion.com>).