

Channeling Doom: Deleted Scenes, February 3 at Rozz-Tox

Written by Jeff Ignatius
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When the quartet Deleted Scenes recorded its second album, *Young People's Church of the Air*, the atmosphere was "intense and pressurized," resulting in a "doomed energy," singer/guitarist/co-songwriter Dan Scheuerman has said.

In an interview this week promoting his band's February 3 performance at Rozz-Tox, Scheuerman elaborated on those intriguing phrases. To start, the recording period was more compressed than for the band's debut, he said: "We wanted the record to have a moment. Instead of being recorded over a year, it was recorded over more like three months. In that sense, it's more identifiable as one piece of work."

But the time frame was just one factor. "There was a weird vibe going on in the studio," Scheuerman said. Producer L. Skell "is hard to read. So there was a lot of silence and glowering And so we'd go in a direction and not be sure what was going on. And then when

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things seemed dark and we weren't getting anywhere, everything would sort of snap together and ... [Skell] would come up with one or two really amazing suggestions to focus everything. There was a sense of ominousness to the proceedings, and that I think created a sense of doom. And there's also a bit of doom in the songwriting as well. ... There was a high degree of tension."

At the album's outset, though, it's hard to hear anything but warmth and uplift. "A Litany for Mrs. T" and "The Days of Adderall" are both luminous and buoyant, with Shins-like vocals and harp-like sounds. "Litany" starts ethereal, but the massive drums and hyperactive, articulate bass ultimately overwhelm that mood – overbearing in a good way. It becomes clear that although these are structured as pop songs, they refuse to be consumed casually.

"We just got really excited about the possibilities of using the studio to experiment and alter the sound and create more of a piece that would stand up to repeated listens ... ," Scheuerman explained. While the band arrived with full songs, it spent studio time "deconstructing the parts and taking away the things that sound standard" and "digging in and messing up sounds and trying to find textures that we hadn't heard before."

Examples include a marimba run through a fuzz pedal, and the vocals on "English as a Second Language" recorded on an audio cassette. This admittedly kitchen-sink recording and production approach could have come across as gimmicky if the final choices didn't assist the songs, but Deleted Scenes' judgment is astute.

The result is an album of rich surfaces that avoids familiar paths and easy resolutions. If there was a sense of doom in the studio, the band channeled that energy into compelling and upbeat adventurousness. Even the mostly-acoustic-guitar-and-vocal "Nassau" finds room for subtle flourishes, with a synth floor and (I think) the slightest bass.

"I wanted it [the album] to be kind of downtrodden but also hopeful. And I think emotionally we got it pretty right," Scheuerman said.

Elsewhere, the album is nimble and light on its feet. "The Days of Adderall" and "Burglarizing the Deaf" crib from African pop without ever coming off as pastiches or trend-chasers. "Bedbedbedbedbed" and "Ordination Day" are relatively straightforward, showing that the band

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isn't afraid to let the songs stand on their own without all that production ornamentation.

The darkness is only plainly evident on the rubbery, big-beat alienation of "A Bunch of People Who Love You Like Crazy," but Deleted Scenes doesn't get bogged down by it. The guitar and Scheuerman's buried vocals snake between the drums and blats, and the song achieves a certain majesty about two-thirds the way through with swelling, glitchy trumpet-like calls and a bass that sounds as if it's pushing its range to the point of pain. Like the most alluringly sinister music Coil created, it shapes sonic shrapnel into an organic form.

Deleted Scenes – with members split between Washington, D.C., and New York – is still relatively obscure, but it might be poised to break out. The ever-fickle Pitchfork.com gave its two albums scores of [8.0](#) and [7.8](#). The site wrote that *Young People's Church of the Air* "squats a unique ground between pop and experimental impulses. It doesn't belong wholly to either world. It's an album that seeks to transcend ugliness, both personal and aural. More often than not, it succeeds on both counts."

Deleted Scenes will perform on Friday, February 3, at Rozz-Tox (2108 Third Avenue in Rock Island, [RozzTox.com](#)). The concert also features A Lull and Healing Power. Admission is \$6, and doors open at 8 p.m.

For more information on Deleted Scenes, visit [DeletedScenesMusic.com](#).