Written by Jeff Ignatius
Wednesday, 19 December 2012 09:05

I first interviewed the Cerny brothers six years ago, back when Scott and Robert were college students at Northern Illinois University. They were then the electronic-rock duo Planning the Rebellion, and I called their debut album “shockingly mature and assured.”

Both of those things still apply, and you can add “ballsy” to mix.

Fronting their four-piece Cerny Brothers band, they’ll be performing at the Redstone Room on December 22 as part of a holiday trip to the family home in Sherrard, Illinois.

Based in Los Angeles and playing an aggressive brand of acoustic Americana, Scott (now 24 years old) and Robert (25) brim with both confidence and an understanding of how the music industry works. They have big dreams they went to L.A. to fulfill, but talking to them last week, they weren’t deluded about their chances, and they don’t expect success to come knocking on their door.

“We’ve always made music and movies,” Scott said of their move to California after college. “We just thought, ‘What’s the best place we could do both those things?’”

This is not one of those get-a-job-and-try-to-squeeze-in-our-passions-on-the-side things; they’re all-in with music. “We don’t have a backup plan,” Scott said. “Fail or succeed, we have literally one objective”: write songs, improve their live show, and “get good enough to a point where people can no longer ignore you. ... We’re getting very good at going into a room and turning people who don’t care about us into people that care about us.”

“We’ve always known who we are and what we want to do, and that sort of core thing never was really shaken to a point where we really questioned it,” Robert said. “The other stuff gets worked out. ...

“There’s never a moment in my mind that I see in the future I’m like, ‘Okay, fail. Gotta do something else.’ Until I’m 80 years old, I’ll keep writing songs and I’ll keep going at it, because I just don’t know how else to live or what else to do.”

Their artistic development reflects what they’ve learned. Last year’s self-released *Dream* – on which the brothers were backed by the Giving Tree band – was a gorgeously articulated, wise-beyond-their-years album that included one of my favorite songs of the year, “The Thief.” But it was a relatively quiet record, and that doesn’t cut it in Los Angeles.

So they added a drummer and an upright-bass player and recorded a self-titled album earlier this year with producer Matt Linesch. This relationship underscores the realistic approach the brothers have with their career. Linesch, who also produced the Edward Sharpe & the Magnetic Zeros album *Here*, is an up-and-coming name who can help open doors. “It’s definitely like a legitimacy thing,” Scott said.

But he also noted that the milestone is not an end in itself. “These things are very small victories,” he said.

The songs on *The Cerny Brothers* are shorter and “more in-your-face,” Scott said. “It’s about refining what you’re going to say and saying it as loudly and clearly as you can say it.”

With *Dream*, he said, “people were into it, they liked it ... , but no one was really excited about it. No one was really promoting it for us in a way. ... It taught me and Robert a lot of lessons about what you have to do to get people’s attention. Sometimes I feel like you’ve really got to earn a slow song.”

Two labels are interested in releasing *The Cerny Brothers*, he said, and the brothers hope to have it out next year. One highlight is “Ohio,” a bright slice of nostalgia and desire that showcases the Cernys’ Midwestern roots and the strength of their voices, guitar, and banjo. It climaxes with a soaring, somewhat corny chorus (“Oh, I think about you all the time”) that works because of both the astute songwriting around it and the song’s deeply felt performance; there’s a smart balance here between artful craft and instant accessibility.

But, of course, it’s possible that the Cerny brothers won’t find a suitable label to release their new album, and it’s possible that they won’t be able to turn their abundant skills into a music career in the competitive L.A. scene.

When I asked Robert about failure, he said something that felt true and honestly modest: “We see what it looks like with our band every day.” But they’ve gotten enough positive reaction from people in the music business to reinforce the idea that “we can do this, it’s possible, and we’re good enough.”

The Cerny Brothers will perform on Saturday, December 22, at the Redstone Room (129 Main Street in Davenport; RiverMusicExperience.org). The show starts at 8 p.m. – with Tallgrass opening – and tickets are $8 in advance and $10 the day of the show.

For more information on the Cerny Brothers, visit TheCernyBrothers.com .