

No Joke: Har-di-Har, October 26 at Rozz-Tox

Written by Jeff Ignatius

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There are many unusual things about the married-couple musical duo Har-di-Har, including the way songs swerve, shift, collapse, explode, die, and rise again with little warning. But it's unlikely that you'll get to hear their *strangest* songs when they perform at Rozz-Tox on Saturday.

Some odd bits first:

- The name Har-di-Har is drawn obliquely from the theme music of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, and that information is as helpful as any of the other explanations given by the band.
- The pair shares a drum kit, with Julie Thoreen playing the “hands” and Andrew Thoreen the “feet.”

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- People who purchase a USB drive with the band's two EPs will get all future Har-di-Har releases uploaded to it for free at a live show.
- The Thoreens decided to pursue music before they'd played a single show as a band.
- Har-di-Har's Facebook page calls its music "psychedelic dream pop intricately composed and played the way three-legged contests are won."

"We cannot do anything the way other people do it," Julie Thoreen said in a phone interview last week.

A case in point is the band's commissioning program, through which you can get a custom Har-di-Har song for \$55. This was an idea for an income stream, and although the group is no longer focusing on commissions, they're still available on its [Web site](#) .

Julie said Har-di-Har did seven commissions, and she cited two of them as particularly challenging. These are the (even) weird(er) songs – great songwriting exercises unlikely to ever get public performances. One was a love song written for the commissioner's spouse, with dark lyrics provided and a mandate to do it in an acid-rock style. "It's very strange to write a love song for somebody else's wife," Julie said.

The other was a company's 11 core values done in the style of "The Twelve Days of Christmas," a self-evidently brutal assignment that Julie said took a month to write.

This less-beaten path appears typical for Har-di-Har. The couple had been saving money since 2010 for a move from Cedar Falls, Iowa, to a larger city, and in late 2011 they decided to pursue music. "If we don't do this now, we're never going to do it," Julie said.

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The duo and shared-drum formats, she said, were practical considerations drawn from Andrew's experience as part of a four-piece band: "How can we can make this as easy as possible to do as quickly as possible? To be able to write together, rehearse together whenever we want to We tour in a station wagon. It's unbelievably economical for us to tour."

The goal for January 2012 was to write a song a day. In August, they released their first EP – *Word(s) of Whim*

– and quit their jobs. A second EP – *Feudal Kind*

– was released in December.

This year, the pair moved to Minneapolis, and a third EP – *Hard Parent/Thick Child* – will be released in December.

Releasing EPs quickly is a concession to the attention spans of modern listeners, Julie said, but it's also a way for Har-di-Har to move forward quickly. "It allows us to continue pushing outward ... ," she said. "Instead of sitting on creative work ... we want to just get it out there because we believe that quantity is what's going to make us the best."

One shouldn't infer that the amount of music is more important than whether it's good, but the point is that a group that's been making music for less than two years is developing quickly – a process that can both be documented and accelerated by relatively frequent short releases.

The EPs are disparate, so it's difficult to mark the precise path of the evolution. (In truth, the course of Har-di-Har sometimes seems to jerk in a new direction *within* a song.)

On the first two EPs, certainly, the vibe of any given song is largely driven by instrumental choices.)(Beyond the two sharing singing and drum duties, Julie plays keyboards, and Andrew plays guitar, bass, and trombone.)

Feudal Kind's first two songs are defined by the use of bass instead of acoustic guitar. "Campaign" has a gently funky feel, with the grounded bass and bass drum playing off Julie's

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ethereal singing – bridging the gap between the earth and the heavens. But the other two songs are wispy and elusive.

Word(s) of Whim's "Strength Behind" is jazzy with passages featuring a discordant blend of keyboards and trombone, while the remainder of the EP is dominated by gorgeously twinned vocals from husband and wife.

The forthcoming *Hard Parent/Thick Child* seems at once more cogent and unruly. Each track encompasses more aspects of the band's sound without diverging from its core sounds; listening to any short passage, the songs seem conventional.

But surprises abound, starting with the percussion and noise explosion at the climax of the opening track. I received the EP as a single file, and some of its shifts are so abrupt that I'm not certain of the starting and stopping points of its six tracks.

But that seems right for a band that refuses to conform: It's impossible to guess what's going to come next.

Har-di-Har will perform on Saturday, October 26, at Rozz-Tox (2108 Third Avenue, Rock Island; RozzTox.com). The show starts at 9 p.m. and also features the Fiyah. The cover is \$5.

For more information on Har-di-Har, visit HarDiHar.com .