

Written by Jeff Ignatius

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In reviewing The World Is a Beautiful Place & I Am No Longer Afraid to Die's *Whenever, If Ever*, Pitchfork.com

[said](#)

it's "a rare debut that's powered by an almost frightening will to live, a desperation that strongly suggests the people involved have no other option to deal with what's inside of them."

That's a somewhat ironic assessment, given that the band almost didn't complete the album. "We weren't sure if everybody was going to break up or if we were going to finish the thing ... ," guitarist Greg Horbal said in a phone interview last week. "I think for a while, even I was kind of like, 'If we get this record done, it'll be a miracle.'"

The bulk of the recording was done in mid-2012, Horbal said, but singer Thomas Diaz's medical problems left him unable to commit to the band – putting both the group and the album in a lurch.

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Diaz eventually decided to leave the group – he was replaced by David Bello – and that was the main catalyst for the album’s completion. “It took a while to really get everybody else on board to be like, ‘Yes, I want to finish this. This is what I want to do with my time,’” Horbal said. But once everybody decided to push forward with the band, he said, “getting the record to finish itself wasn’t that difficult.”

The eight-member Connecticut-based band – playing Rozz-Tox on January 22 – is part of an emo revival, but its sound encompasses much more. Pitchfork noted the album’s “post-rock and emo extremes,” while PopMatters.com [called](#) it “space rock” but highlighted its instantly accessible elements: “These songs bleed emo and pop-punk, with chord progressions that give you a head rush and get people in the front row bobbing.”

Although *Whenever, If Ever* is certainly defined by its emo directness, the “space rock” descriptor is equally appropriate, as the album often feels adrift – not in a negative sense, but in the way it moves naturally and casually from mood to mood, with ideas given just the right amount of time and attention to be fully developed. The expansive sound leaves room for synths, horns, and multiple vocal parts in a guitar-rock aesthetic, and it’s assembled with enough care that nothing feels out-of-place. The relatively straightforward “Gig Life” in that context is three minutes of climactic clarity – as if the rest of the album leads to and from that point.

The band’s style is almost certainly a function of its large size. Composition is a “group effort,” Horbal said, but it often takes place over an extended period of time. Three people might work on a song, and demos might then be given to three other members, who usually add their own ideas. “It’s rare that our songs get worked out in a day,” he said. “Usually it’s a multiple-week process – even multiple months. And it’s fine.”

In the coming year, the band plans to release a series of four or five split seven-inch singles with different bands, and it’s also finishing up a collaboration with spoken-word artist Chris Zizzamia – a more ambient effort that demonstrates that “emo” is far too limiting a label for the band.

The World Is a Beautiful Place & I Am No Longer Afraid to Die will perform on Wednesday, January 22, at Rozz-Tox (2108 Third Avenue, Rock Island). The all-ages show starts at 8 p.m. and also includes *A Great Big Pile of Leaves*. Admission is \$10, and advance tickets are available at RozzTox.com/tickets .

A Re-Birth for Emo – and a Band: The World Is a Beautiful Place & I Am No Longer Afraid to Die, January 2

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For more information on The World is a Beautiful Place, visit TheWorldIsABeautifulPlace.com.