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MUSIC: FEATURE

Phaser



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Shifting, stunning: Phaser's matching ensembles

Life and illusion

By [Omar Perez](#)

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In the culinary world, the odds of baking an authentic Shepherd's Pie using lowly Stove Top mix are slim to none. Washington, D.C.'s Phaser may not be out to replicate English cuisine but somewhere down the line, they've managed to combine the elegance of an Englishman with the grit of a Yank and create a balanced musical dish.

"A lot of people compare us to Spiritualized, the Verve or Oasis, but they weren't the impetus of it all," says Phaser vocalist/guitarist/keyboardist Siayko Shalsky. "I like them, but I was never a fan of it until people started pointing it out to me and I started listening to it more and more. It wasn't by choice that we sound English, but that's just what was in our background -- the kind of music we grew up on."

Regardless of the comparisons, the band's space-rock quality transcends any nationality, its ethereal sound drenched with layers of guitar that brandish waves of reverb. Its latest album, "Sway" offers its share of trance-inducing Pink Floyd-like moments on tracks like "Northern Light," while opening up passages of lush beauty "(Can't Get You) Out of My Mind" and delving into country-tinged twangs that hover over a gospel cloud on the title track. Experiencing the orchestration alone, it's no surprise that the band (Siayko and his brother/bassist/vocalist Boris, guitarist Paul Wood and drummer Ritse DeJong) takes days on end just to get the right guitar sound "We're super picky about how things sound," Shalsky says. "We recorded this album before the final version, like, three times."

Sons of a mother who was a concert pianist during her early 20s and a father who dabbled in guitar and piano, Siayko and Boris jammed occasionally but their respective projects kept them busy while growing up. It wouldn't be until six years ago that a then-bandless Boris suggested to an also-bandless Siayko that they start writing together. "I had my ideas and he had his ideas, and we were trying to accomplish different things before," remembers Siayko. "But we finally honed the sound that we were looking for."

Still, with just one guitarist in the band, the Shalsky brothers felt the sound wasn't layered enough until Wood and his chemistry set rack of effects came aboard. (Fellow Shalsky brother Roman helps out during live shows on ivory duties.) "When we were playing as a four piece it was impossible to make the live shows as true as possible to the album," Siayko says.

In 1998 and with a different drummer and guitar player, the band recorded the "Silverscreen Daydream" EP and, two years later, recorded and self-released 2000's EP "Skydive," which earned the band a small but growing fanbase and, despite a limited pressing, an eight-week slot on *CMJ*'s Top 200. Gradually stretching their live performance schedule outside of the Capitol area, booking their own shows with the Shalsky Bros. pulling the grunt of promotion, Phaser released 2002's "Sway," which Emperor Norton Records picked up and re-released with new artwork and two bonus tracks. Partly reminded of the adage of the tree that falls in the forest, the band didn't want "Sway" to fall by the wayside.

"We always thought [Sway] lacked something, and we wanted to add something to it, and this was the perfect opportunity," Shalsky says. "Now everyone can hear it. We have the opportunity of getting exposed to a much larger audience."

