

THE BANDIT KINGS



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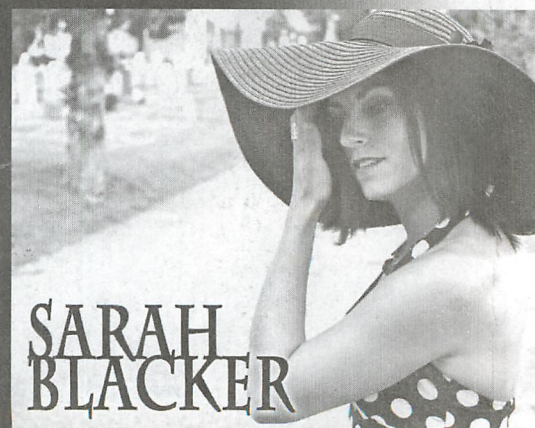
DO NOT FORSAKE ME OH MY DARLING

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DO NOT FORSAKE ME OH MY DARLING

by DJ Mätthew Griffin

Inspired by '60s cult status television show *The Prisoner*, Sophia Cacciola (drums and vocals) and Michael J. Epstein (bass) are the avant garde art-rock duo Do Not Forsake Me Oh My Darling, who are taking Boston by storm. A real anomaly in the New England music scene, DNFMOMD have painstakingly recreated the introduction to *The Prisoner*, in their video for "Episode 1: Arrival," which has become an internet hit. What follows is a Q & A with Sophia Cacciola, speaking about her inspiration behind the magic that is Do Not Forsake Me Oh My Darling!

Noise: Tell me a little bit about Do Not Forsake Me Oh My Darling.

Sophia: We're a loud, arty, minimalist, punky, no-wave rock duo—drums/vocals by me and bass by Michael J. Epstein. Our songs are inspired by the '60s cult spy-fi TV show, *The Prisoner*.

Noise: Why *The Prisoner*?

Sophia: We started watching *The Prisoner* at almost exactly the same time that I started playing drums. I had taken a break from playing guitar and singing in Blitzkriegbliss, and I had just convinced Michael that he had time for DNFMOMD in addition to his band at the time, the Motion Sick. We became totally enraptured with *The Prisoner*. I was mesmerized by the lead, Number 6—played by the amazing Patrick McGoochan. He was an individualist, a moralist, a master of sarcasm, and episode after episode, his will could not be broken! He would often even turn the tables on those trying to break him. It was never clear who would lose at the end of the hour. The show had great themes that addressed modern sociopolitical thought—conforming to society's expectations, the value of free will, Big Brother surveillance, etc. The themes hinted at and elicited so many emotions that I already tended to focus on in my writing, things like: paranoia, confinement, anger, and non-conformity. So it was very easy for me to allow the show to become part of the fabric of my music.

Noise: How closely are the songs tied to the show? Do you need to have seen

the show to understand the songs?

Sophia: All of the songs are inspired by, and named after, episodes of the show. I start by rewatching an episode and jotting ideas down. I let the themes of the episode stew for a while as I try to embed myself in that universe. Some songs have more obvious and superficial references than others. "The Chimes of Big Ben" opens with, unsurprisingly, the chimes of Big Ben, which were a major plot element in the conclusion of that episode. The chorus of the future release, "The Girl Who Was Death" is "you have just been poisoned," which appears in writing at the bottom of a glass that Number 6 has finished drinking from. I would never want to write songs that just recap the plots, and it is very

important to us that the songs don't demand the show's context. The songs need to stand on their own as songs.

Noise: Does the specific scope of writing or minimalist instrumentation ever feel limiting?

Sophia: It prevents writer's block! The show sparks an idea and things flow from there. Michael was adamant about getting a sound for his bass that was full while avoiding turning into a pedal "tweaker." The bass is sent to a bass rig and split via octave pedal into a guitar rig, creating a unique hybrid sound. Even without guitar, people actually often ask who the uncredited guitar player is on our records. The vocals tend toward rhythmic talk-singing and shouting over fairly simple drumming and we end up with a lot of



Sophia & Michael

Photo: Kelly Davidson

loud/soft and stop/start dynamics.

Noise: How does this play out live?

Sophia: We're very visually deliberate. We wear black outfits with white piping, directly inspired by the show. We've included Rover, the security system from *The Prisoner*—actually an 8-foot weather balloon—in our shows from time to time. Recently, someone told us that he always knows exactly which of our bands is playing in photos he sees just by our outfits. Because I am sitting down, I feel like I have to work just a little bit harder to connect. I try to use my hands, arms, legs, my eyes, and anything else I've got to connect with the audience. Playing in the Rumble this year pushed us to step up the energy of our live shows and be more dedicated to performance.

Noise: So, early in the summer you released a video for the first song of your series, "Episode 1: Arrival." Can you tell us about that?

Sophia: Yeah, "Arrival" is a shot-for-shot recreation of the opening titles to *The Prisoner*. It was a huge endeavor as we were recreating something that is 40 years old and was shot in London and Wales! We made the video with director Theodore Cormey of Lost Jockey Productions and he worked tirelessly finding locations and organizing shoots. It took about two years, from when we first approached him with the idea to finish, including 11 actual days of shooting! All this for a three-minute video. Our biggest break in planning the video was finding a Caterham Prisoner-series replica of the Lotus 7 in the show. As far as we know, fewer than 40 were made to order in 1990. Not many are in the U.S. at all, but the one we had access to may have been the only right-hand drive one in the U.S. We shot scenes all over Massachusetts—down to the Cape for the beach shots; back to Revere Beach

in December to pick up the closing shot; an airport in Lawrence for the opening; the Horticultural Society in Wellesley to replace Portmeirion; We took over my sister's apartment while she was away for a long weekend and built elaborate interior sets there. We even had miniature sets built for a few shots. We aimed for as close to perfect replication as we could get.

Noise: How did *Prisoner* fans react?

Sophia: The response has been really amazing and wonderful. The video has over 30,000 views and it was picked up by a bunch of nerd/geek blogs, which was really cool. *The Prisoner* fans were almost unanimously excited by it. They knew better than anyone else the lengths to which we went to really get it right, and they appreciated it for the labor of love that it was!

Noise: You also just released a video for your Leonard Cohen cover?

Sophia: Yeah, so we worked with Killer Suit's Glenn Di Benedetto, who also fronts the fantastic loungecore band, Parlour Bells. It was a comparatively low-key affair—mostly shot around Somerville. It's an original spy-caper adventure set to our cover of "First We Take Manhattan," which has become a live signature song for us. The video has a few shout-outs to *The Prisoner*, but we felt a lot less restricted conceptually because it was for a cover.

Noise: You and Michael do a lot of collaborative projects, not just limited to these video collaborations.

Sophia: We've gotten really excited to work with others in a variety of projects. We have the indie-ensemble-pop band The Michael J. Epstein Memorial Library, a project involving six other women, Space Balloons with Joe Kowan—aka J. Krafty—writing space songs for children, and Darling Pet Munkee with Cathy Cappozzi

of Axemunkee for which we write garage-rock songs about items sold in old comic books—sea-monkeys, x-ray specs, and the like! We try to cover a lot of ground musically. It keeps everything in a positive perspective and keeps everything fresh. There is also great synergy across projects that result from thinking in all different directions.

Noise: What are the upcoming plans for the band?

Sophia: With DNFMOMD, I've just started approaching some friends to collaborate on some duet covers to be released over the course of 2012. We've already got Glenn Di Benedetto of Parlour Bells, Ad Frank, and Tad McKitterick of Sidewalk Driver committed! I'm also trying to write the final six songs of *The Prisoner* project by the end of 2011. We've released 11 of the 17 episodes thus far. Then, we have to decide how to release the final package. At this point, we're considering something Kickstarter-esque to see if there is an interest in a vinyl box set. If there is not money backing that, we probably won't do it. That seems to be the way the music industry is headed—just ask the fans what they want and deliver it! Once we're finished with the 17 songs, I'll have to really think about the future direction of the band's sound, aesthetic, etc. It's a chance to make changes or keep it the same, but I'm still deciding on that!

Do Not Forsake Me Oh My Darling will be playing their final show of 2011, opening for Projektfest '11, on Saturday November 12th, at the Middle East Downstairs at 7:00PM. The event is sponsored by Ibanez Guitars, who will be giving away a Darkstone electric guitar. You must be present to win!



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