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MUSIC**Cutting edge**

Scissor Sisters strive to rescue radio with fun pop

BY JIM RADOSTA



Babydaddy (second from right) brings the glam-pop crew to Portland on Sept. 25

When Clear Channel started polluting the airwaves with its corporate sewage, old-school pop music landed on top of radio's endangered species list. If it's not a financially lucrative sound—teeny-bop, hip-hop or what's now considered "alternative"—you'll have a hard time finding it on the FM dial.

Thank goodness, then, that Scissor Sisters have come to the rescue. The flamboyant New York City quintet is fighting the format formula with a simple mission statement: Let's make great, accessible, non-alienating music that can be proudly proclaimed as "pop."

"We've never been afraid of using that word," says Babydaddy, the band's 28-year-old multi-instrumentalist.

"Sometimes 'pop' can sound dirty, especially in the age of Britney Spears."

As their dyke-inspired name suggests, Scissor Sisters have a strong queer sensibility. The band was born five years ago when Babydaddy, who was setting up a home studio and dabbling in music as a hobby, connected with another gay guy, singer Jake Shears.

"We all had day jobs," Babydaddy says of the early days. "I was working in TV production to make ends meet."

The pair later were joined by performance artist Ana Matronic (who describes herself as "a drag queen stuck in a woman's body"), guitarist Del Marquis and drummer Paddy Boom, and the music started flowing naturally. Babydaddy still marvels at their collaborative camaraderie.

"I've been writing music all my life, and I was never in a situation where something clicked as well as this does," he says. "It's almost surprising at times how, in two days, I come out of the studio and come out of a zone, really, and all of a sudden there's this song. It's never happened for me that way before, and I know there is a certain magic in what happens."

The band's voodoo is evident throughout its self-titled debut album, which achieves pure pop perfection on virtually every track—from the giddy hooker homage "Filthy/Gorgeous" (featuring raunchy rhymes like "you trip on a hit of acid...your biggest moneymaker's flaccid") to the earnest ballad "Mary" to the bombastic epic "Return to Oz," in which Shears shares his memories of the Seattle drug scene:

"What once was Emerald City's now a crystal town." Scissor Sisters also put the "pink" in Pink Floyd with a flaming cover of "Comfortably Numb" sung in a Bee Gees-worthy falsetto.

Babydaddy credits several sources for this amalgamation of sounds. "I'm more a product of the '90s than anything...listening to grunge and Smashing Pumpkins and that whole scene when I was in high school. That is what spoke to me."

He also was influenced by the music his parents played on the radio during family road trips, as well as a Billy Joel songbook he followed at the piano when he was 12. "Not that I think Billy Joel is the coolest guy in the world, but what he brought to what he did was a pop sensibility that I find common in every-

thing that I love."

Scissor Sisters' first U.S. single, "Take Your Mama," has caught MTV's eye and garnered buzz for its similarities to classic tunes from queer cohort Elton John.

"I think it's been a blessing and a curse," Babydaddy says of the constant

comparisons. "If you listen to a lot of the other songs on the album, that's a pretty honky-tonk, piano, American-sounding rock 'n' roll song. Yes, Elton John did that, [but] Jake wrote those lyrics and that melody without really being too familiar with Elton John at all."

Meanwhile, one comparison particularly confuses him.

"People call us the new Village People, and I've seen it in some very big publications," Babydaddy says. "I don't know—besides the fact that a few of us are gay, and we dress up...I don't think it's valid, and I think it's lazy."

As with many artists whose sound is hard to classify, Scissor Sisters are huge in Europe but have yet to make it big in the States. (Call it the Robbie Williams Curse.) Time will tell whether Americans are going to catch on.

"At the moment, things are going better than I had expected in the U.S.," Babydaddy says. "I'm trying to have very few expectations about things. We're just gonna keep doing the work, and I do have faith that if you have a good thing and you do the work involved, then people will come out." **JR**

SCISSOR SISTERS perform 9 p.m. Sept. 25 at Roseland Theater, 8 N.W. Sixth Ave. Tickets are \$11 from TicketsWest.