

BLEEDING OF THE SUBCONSCIOUS

"This sounds really young, it sounds like early **Helio Sequence**," says Brandon Summers, the band's singer and guitarist, of the new record. "To me, it feels like a 90-degree sunny day in Portland."

The Portland-based alt-rock duo is back on stage for a West Coast summer tour, during which the band is unveiling tracks from the new album, due out in early 2015. *EW* caught up with Helio Sequence two days after they finished recording.

Two years after the release of *Negotiations*, Summers and Benjamin Weikel (drums, keyboard) decided to change their creative process and leave space for pure spontaneity. "*Negotiations* was a very labored record. For this album we wanted something different, with no pre-meditation," Summers says.

Instead of planning the new album, they spent five weeks "jamming," recording 10-plus-minute keyboard and guitar loops and lyrics fragments. "Stop it. Save it. Leave it," is how Summers describes the band's creative philosophy. "Then we listened to it, looking for that initial spark."

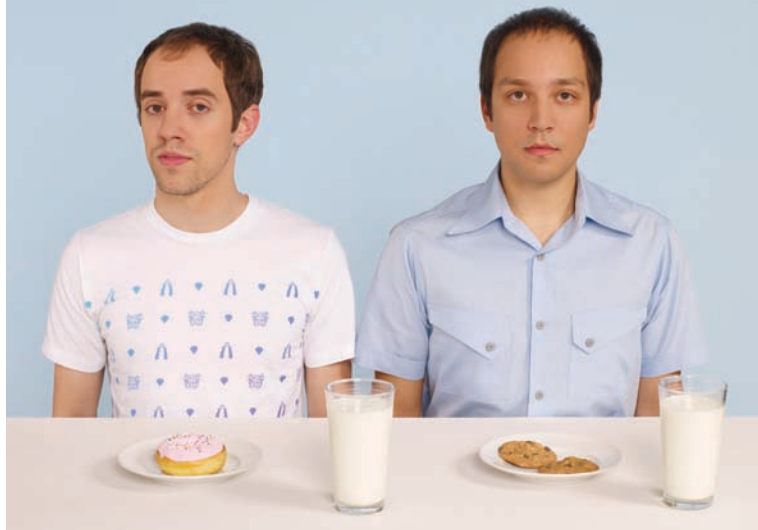
That spark may be a single word or a bassline; from this, the duo put together about 26 demo songs without mixing, burned a CD and asked their closest circle of friends to vote for their "Top 10."

"These five weeks were the most intense of my creative process," Summers says. The result is a somewhat younger, more upbeat record, which mirrors, in a lot of ways, the band's roots. From the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper* to My Bloody Valentine, Summers recognizes the footprint of music he and Weikel listened to as teens.

The new record, Summers says, will feature introspective, diary-like lyrics, more backbeat and even some unexpected funky basslines like in the song "Battle Lines."

"Words that meant nothing together suddenly do. It's really a bleeding of the subconscious," Summers says. "Inevitably, you listen to it and then you realize 'Oh my god, that's what that song is about.'"

The Helio Sequence joins New Zealand singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist **Liam Finn** 8 pm Wednesday, Aug. 20, at WOW Hall; \$15. — *Barbara Marty*



BURN BOATS, NOT BRIDGES

In 2009, **Shelby Earl** quit her job on Amazon's music team to record her first album. The Seattle singer-songwriter was excited; after three years of promoting other musicians at the internet giant, she was going to be the one promoted — hopefully.

"Then six months in it got really scary. It got really real and the money ran out," Earl tells *EW*. "I told my mom I was freaking out."

Earl's mother responded, "Well, you know, Shelby, someone asked how you were doing." Her mother went on to say that Earl's stepdad told them "she pulled all the boats ashore and she burned them." He was referring to the legend of Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés ordering his army to burn their fleet of ships so they couldn't retreat from battle.

"I wrote this song that day," Earl says of "Burn The Boats." "I named the record that because it just felt so right."

Coming full circle, Amazon named *Burn The Boats* the "No. 1 Outstanding 2011 Album You Might Have Missed" and NPR music critic Ann Powers deemed Earl her "new favorite songwriter."

Oddly enough, only a snippet of the titular song by the folk-rocker made the album, but Earl toured with it and, before long, it became "sort of an anthem" with audiences. The day after Earl plays Sam Bond's Aug. 17 — the first stop on her tour — she will finally release "Burn The Boats" through the Seattle-based London Tone Music's 52X52 project, in which the music production company releases a new song by a different artist every week for a year.

In the meantime, Earl came out with 2013's *Swift Arrows*. The sophomore album is, like fellow folk-rockers Neko Case's *Middle Cyclone* and Jenny Lewis' *Acid Tongue*, a blazing vocal and lyrical knockout. The soulful title track — a heartache-filled breakup tune in which Earl croons "When words are all you've got, you'll find one poison-tipped swift arrow in your mind/ And they'll find one poison-tipped swift arrow in their eye" over doo-wop piano and church bells — caught the attention of *Rolling Stone* in November.

In the past year, accolades for *Swift Arrows* have come pouring in from *Paste Magazine*, *American Songwriter*, KEXP and NPR, who featured Earl on "Music For Folks Who've Been Through A Few Things." *Salon.com* says Earl "writes songs for grownups."

When I ask her about this "grownup" label, she laughs.

"I think that it's great because it's true. I'm a grownup songwriter. I'm not 20," she says. "I don't attempt to do that. I just write about my own stuff and what's going on with my friends and what I see around me." She continues, "The songwriters I respect write about real stuff, not kid stuff." She ticks off names like Case and Lewis, as well as Ryan Adams, Björk, Rufus Wainwright and Ben Gibbard.

"They are all song-oriented artists," she says. "They can all embody that idea that if you have a pretty voice, you can't sing about pretty things."

Shelby Earl plays after Sacramento's folk-pop artist **Justin Farren** 8:30 pm Sunday, Aug. 17, at Sam Bond's; \$5. To see Earl's video for "Swift Arrows" and read what she said about the process, visit the *EW* blog. — *Alex Notman*



humm[™]
kombucha

EUGENE EMERALDS

Now on tap at PK Park

MEDICAL MARIJUANA CLINIC

Are You Tired of Pills?

Do You Suffer From:

- Severe Pain
- Muscle Spasms
- Seizures
- Glaucoma
- Cancer
- AIDS
- Severe Nausea
- Cachexia
- Alzheimer's
- PTSD

We Offer

- Chiropractic Care
- Acupuncture
- Primary Care
- Marijuana Therapy



An Established & Respected Clinic For Over 15 Years • We've Been Here For You!

Southern Oregon Alternative Medicine

Springfield Location 152 Main St.

www.southernoregonalternativemedicine.com

(541) 844-1708