



A TRUER PLANE OF BEING

Examining post-rock spirituality with Eugene's Paleons

PHOTO COURTESY JONATHAN B SMITH; CREATOR @ COLLECTOR SERVICES LLC

In 18th-century poet William Blake's invented mythology, the character Urizen embodies conventional reason and law, often depicted as a bearded old man carrying nets or architects' tools. Blake was fascinated by the tension between enlightenment and humanity's baser instincts — free love, for example — and through Urizen, the poet seems to present societal dictums as a trap or snare preventing humans from reaching their truest plane of existence.

"Urizen" is also a track from Eugene post-rock band **Paleons'** latest release, *Hyperborean*, now out digitally and on CD at House of Records in Eugene. Recorded here at Sprout City Studios, *Hyperborean* will be released June 25 on vinyl.

Entirely instrumental, the record draws from doom

metal, sludge, space rock and psychedelic music, itself an examination of life's duality — dark and light, reason and emotion, freedom and restraint, with religious and spiritual imagery throughout, such as pansophism, the idea of omniscience or universal knowledge.

Explaining why he writes strictly instrumentals, Paleons bandleader and lead guitarist Mark Leahey says: "It's easier for me to not have to think in terms of a message and verse/chorus songwriting style. It frees up my compositions to be as recursive, linear, long or short as I want."

Leahey jokes, "I am a terrible singer and an even worse lyricist." In addition, he also draws inspiration from sci-fi works like Frank Herbert's *Dune* as well as apocalyptic tales of human survival. "It mostly comes from an interest in esoteric mysticism and the occult."

Throughout *Hyperborean*, Leahey's searing, riff-oriented guitar work loops hypnotically and sometimes soars over a rhythm section and song structures rooted in the post-rock style popularized by bands like Explosions in the Sky or even Eugene's own This Patch of Sky.

But Leahey says his band is more than just post-rock, citing other influences such as kraut rock and even garage rock and punk. The 12-minute epic "The Circle and Eternity" features some of *Hyperborean's* most hot-blooded playing, telling a story in sound complete with a beginning, middle and end.

And elsewhere, such as on tracks like "Sun at The Eastern Gate," Paleons seem to use free-flowing, almost New Age-inspired violin played expressively by Meg Graham, representing beauty against Leahey's darker, more mathematical guitar. She is acting as Los, the character Blake conjured representing imagination and pleasure, opposing yet partnered with Urizen's reasoning intellect.

For centuries, humanity's greatest writers and thinkers have wrestled with the idea of duality, whether free will leads toward the dark or the light. So it would be unreasonable to expect Paleons to reach conclusions about these questions in one album.

But in asking those questions, Paleons have produced one of Eugene's most complete and satisfying rock recordings in recent memory.

Paleons play with **Ditch @ The Delta** 9 pm Wednesday, May 17, at Old Nick's; \$5, 21-plus. They celebrate the release of *Hyperborean* on vinyl LP with Portland's **Cam-brian Explosion** and LA's **Barrows** 8 pm Sunday, June 25, at Old Nick's; \$5, 21-Plus. ■



LEFT TO RIGHT: ACTORS KARI WELCH, SARAH GLIDDEN, DAMON NOYES AND JOEL ALBRECHT IN *TIME STANDS STILL*

THROUGH A MIRROR, DARKLY

VLT's *Time Stands Still* takes aim at journalism, truth and guilt

I hear a lot of people saying they wish they saw more positive news stories — that they're tired of the gruesome, sad pieces they read online, or see on TV, about war and disease-stricken countries. I'm not going to lie and say that I enjoy those types of stories, though I do think they're important. But maybe, as a journalist, I'm biased.

This tension, between telling tough stories and leading a normal life, clashes within Sarah Goodwin, one of the main characters in *Time Stands Still*. The play, directed by James Aday at Very Little Theatre, steps into the lives of four people: Sarah, a warzone photojournalist returning home after being injured by a roadside bomb; her boyfriend, James, also a journalist; Sarah's photo editor, Richard; and his new young, bubbly girlfriend, Mandy.

In the second act, Richard and Mandy sit on the couch in Sarah and James' realistically cramped New York studio

apartment looking at Sarah's photos a few days after her return. Mandy comes across a photo of a woman crying over a badly burned child. Shocked, she asks Sarah if the child was dead.

"Not yet," Sarah replies. "He was in shock. He died a few minutes later." Mandy badgers Sarah, questioning her morals in conjunction with her career, asking why she didn't do anything more to help save the child. Sarah responds that she was helping, by taking his picture and telling his story.

Journalists, Sarah continues, are there to "record life. Not change it."

Time Stands Still covers a mish-mash of topics — journalistic ethics, PTSD, infidelity and perfectionism, to list a few. But, surprisingly, instead of feeling like it shoves too many subjects into its plot, *Time Stands Still* stays relevant and engaging.

Sarah and James' relationship, although bound by journalism, can be applied to any work-obsessed couple. Does it thrive solely because of their mutual enjoyment of traveling the world to pin down the toughest stories? Or can it survive beyond that, into the sleepy contentment of a "normal" life?

Although suffering the same blunders that many opening night productions do — a few slipped lines, some awkwardly acted conversations — as a whole, *Time Stands Still* is so well-written that any miscues were overshadowed.

At times the set, designed by Lizzy Baggins in VLT's small Stage Left, seems to melt away. The minute details, such as exotic-looking tapestries hanging on the walls — potentially gathered by Sarah and James from a trip abroad — and a mini-fridge filled with last week's take-out and adorned with magnets and old photographs, make the fights around the small kitchen table, the reconciliations, the love — both platonic and romantic — seem plausible. At points it feels as though we, as an audience, are voyeurs, peeking into the apartment window and into the intimate relationships of strangers.

The way in which the characters are written nurtures this authenticity. The strongest character is the jaded, stubborn and painstakingly passionate Sarah (Kari Boldon Welch), balanced brilliantly by the at-first spacey but eventually loveable and confident Mandy (Sarah Glidden). The male characters, James (Damon Noyes) and Richard (Joel Albrecht), although slightly second-rung to the women, are still dimensional and dynamic, hot-blooded when needed but always well intentioned.

Time Stands Still is not only a pleasant theatrical expedition but also a self-aware journey that inherently holds a mirror up to its audience. It acknowledges the absurdity of walking the tightrope between desire and necessity, career and personal life, comfort and danger — and the hypocrisy of criticizing the negative news that we all passively view as privileged Americans.

And as I watched James accusing Sarah of thriving off the pain of other people, I couldn't help but think that we all are not so innocent of that either. ■

Time Stands Still runs at 7:30 pm May 11-14 at Very Little Theatre (2350 Hilyard St.) Tickets are \$12 at TheVLT.com.