

THE DREAM SYNDICATE

Star party music this weekend at Luckey's



Astro” — related to the stars, celestial objects, or outer space. We wish upon stars, we dream of traveling among them. “Gala” — meaning a party, festival or pageant. In short, a celebration.

Eugene band **Astro Gala** combines these words in their name. And with songs like “Blame” and “Free to Roam,” they celebrate all things starry-eyed — not as something

slight or inconsequential but something bold. For the band, to dream is to step into the unknown.

And leading them all to the edge is the strong vocal work of Ansley Martinez, who moved to Eugene from San Diego about three years ago.

Martinez tells me she grew up on neo and classic soul and jazz singers, but her raw talent and readily apparent skill translate well to Astro Gala’s well-crafted and me-

lodie modern rock.

This is her first time singing with a band, and she’s responsible for all the vocal melodies, working with scratch tracks of guitar riffs and chord progressions. Martinez hears the melody first, she says, sometimes singing gibberish until the words coalesce in her mind.

Astro Gala lead guitarist Matt Zuhn says that while he grew up on pop punk, these days he prefers ambient indie rock. “Very guitar melodic,” he adds, “but a little bit softer of sound.”

Listening to Astro Gala, you can hear this influence in their layers of gauzy and lush chord voicings, as well as their minimal yet sharp and stabbing lead guitar work. There’s a little U2 and The Smiths in Astro Gala’s sound, as well as dream pop and some ’90s-era alt rock.

Since winning a battle of the bands contest presented by local recording studio Sprout City, Astro Gala’s name has been coming up more and more at local venues. In addition to playing shows around town, as part of their prize winnings Astro Gala has been hard at work on a six-song EP at Sprout City studios.

For Zuhn, it’s been a whirlwind.

“We’re at this stage where we’ve had a way we’ve done things so far,” he says. “Over the summer we had so many shows that translated into the battle of the bands win, which translated into recording. It’s this thing we’ve rolled with,” he goes on.

“We haven’t really sat down and gone, ‘this is what we’re going for.’ After this EP is done there’s going to be a lot of growth,” he says. Overall, Zuhn worries Astro Gala has yet to settle into a signature sound.

But I disagree. Moody and dynamic, whatever Astro Gala has going on is quite good, and I’m left dreaming of more.

Astro Gala plays with Will Moore and The Graduating Class 10 pm Saturday, Nov. 10, at Luckey’s; \$5, 21-plus.

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