



Photo by Sam Gerhke

Rose City Killers

PORTLAND BAND **SOFT KILL** PLAYS POST-PUNK INSPIRED BY ADDICTION, RECOVERY AND LOSS

By Will Kennedy

The pandemic disrupted the fundamental rhythms of the music business in 2020 when Portland band Soft Kill released its often-sublime album *Dead Kids, R.I.P. City*. As a result, the band was unable to tour very much in support of it. Still, the record found purchase on rock and alternative Billboard charts, as well as among Soft Kill’s ardent fans.

With a new one-off single, “Press Play,” Soft Kill — heavily informed by post-punk and indebted to bands like The Cure — is now able to fully support the new album with a string of national headlining dates. That tour stops April 28 in Eugene at Sessions Music Hall. *Dead Kids’* follow-up full-length is complete and expected sometime this year or next.

With sold-out shows in most cities, Soft Kill singer, guitarist and primary songwriter Tobias Grave calls the response to the band’s re-emergence surprising and wonderful. Part of the draw is the band’s intense live performances. When Soft Kill is up there on stage, “we have such an investment that it just kind of comes as cathartic release. But there’s a level of intensity that comes as natural,” Grave says.

Along with Grave in the band’s current lineup is his wife, Nicole Colbath, who grew up in Eugene. Although Colbath doesn’t perform with the band on this tour, she contributed lyrical content to *Dead Kids* and handles business and marketing affairs for the band in Portland. Grave says some of the words Colbath contributed to *Dead Kids* were drawn from her life in Lane County.

“Most of the songs are about people we lost to addiction,” he says. “A lot of the people are from Eugene and Portland.”

“*R.I.P. City*” is clearly a dark-humor jolt and a play on the well-known Blazers’ slogan “RIP City.”

On that note, Grave says the album “is a celebration of Portland,” but it’s also a celebration of people in Portland who have died. A lot of people “who lived against the law, against the grain. A lot of artists, a lot of creatives that fell to the disease of addiction.”

Showcasing the interplay of grinding and driving rhythms with simple entwined guitar lines, Grave sings over blasts of icy celestial synth-chords on *Dead Kids’* track “Pretty Face”: “You laid there on New Year’s, your lips were turning blue, I screamed and prayed and swung my fists, to beat the life back through.”

One of the album’s most striking melodic moments comes in the chorus of “Roses All Around.” Elsewhere, soaring melody synth lines introduce “Matty Rue,” like Future Islands by way of Orchestral Maneuvers in the Dark.

In the midst of a triumphant *Dead Kids* tour, Grave says that it’s now time for growth. *Dead Kids* was the first album that Grave wrote sober, and “it was the most concise and to the point execution of what people know of us,” he says.

“It felt like a benchmark record for us that would have been weird to keep repeating,” Grave says.

Soft Kill performs with the quickly rising Portland indie rock band Alien Boy and Topographies, a San Francisco shoegaze band featuring Gray Tolhurst, son of Lol Tolhurst, former longtime drummer for The Cure, 8 pm Thursday, April 28, at Sessions Music Hall; \$15, 21+.



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