

THE SHADOWBOXERS

RED ROOM

Red Room, The Shadowboxers' first full-length album (to be released January 22, 2013 and distributed by Vanguard Records), reveals an uncommonly intelligent, remarkably accomplished young band equally adept at taut three-part harmonies, deep gut grooves and sophisticated songcraft.

On the LP, the Atlanta-based band gleefully skewers stylistic distinctions, sounding equally adept at soul-infused rock (the booty-shaking opener "You Are All I Need," the power-chord-driven "Bad Guy," the resolutely funky "When Can I Be" and "Finish What I Start"), hyper-melodic Beatlesque guitar pop (the wicked-clever tandem of "Sidewalk" and "Fixer") and 21st century-style hookfests (the swinging, harmony-laden "Vienna," the chugging, poignant "On the Move"), set off by strikingly inventive change-ups (the muted-to-thunderous modern-rock anthem "Love on This Side"). Kenny Wayne Shepherd played guitar on "Bad Guy," while Grooveline Horns (Jason Mraz's horn section) played on "You Are All I Need," "Like All the Rest" and "Lovers in Rome." Each of *Red Room*'s 15 tracks is fully realized—all killer, no filler, to borrow Jerry Lee Lewis' immortal turn of phrase.

"There are three different songwriters in this band. 'Love on This Side' and 'Bad Guy' are totally different songs," singer/guitarist Scott Schwartz acknowledges. "But I like that about us—that each song is unique, and that we offer different styles that summon diverse emotions. And the element that keeps everything cohesive is our voices, especially our vocal harmonies, so that the songs are always going to be delivered in the same vessel. Also, each of us has a knack for writing catchy, singable melodies. That feature threads through the record, so that even if the style of a particular song seems to be on the limits of our sound, the melody will reel it back towards the herd."

The Shadowboxers resolve the apparent dichotomy of their eclecticism and the need for a specific sonic identity "by not harping on it—not making it an issue in the first place," singer/guitarist Adam Hoffman explains. "Since we started, people have been suggesting that we pick a genre or style, and we've always been opposed to that—although we always implement elements of soul/R&B into our songs. We've never believed that eclecticism and cohesiveness have to be opposed to one another. We feel like our eclecticism adds variety and interest and actually *contributes* to the overall cohesiveness of our sound."

The founding members—Nashville native Schwartz (guitar, vocals), Iowan Adam Hoffman (guitar, vocals) and New Yorker Matt Lipkins (vocals, keyboards)—have been making music together since their sophomore years at Atlanta's Emory University. They forged a musical approach out of a shared reverence for the sacred texts of rock and soul, from the Beatles and Simon & Garfunkel to Stevie Wonder and D'Angelo. "We pride ourselves on having a current and relevant sound, but there's also a noticeable classic-roots groove element," says Schwartz.

In terms of contemporary music, the bandmembers share an appreciation for Coldplay, John Mayer and early Maroon 5, cutting through the critical white noise and choosing to focus on

these artists' musicality, songcraft and ability to connect with a wide spectrum of listeners. At the other extreme, they admire their indie-rock peers Dawes, who, like them, "have spent so much time playing together and really pride themselves on being a band—not just a collection of songs and players," as Hoffman puts it.

Soon after graduating from Emory in 2011, the Shadowboxers went on a cross-country tour with the Indigo Girls, with whom they share management, doing double duty as the opening act and the duo's backing band. The tour—and the particular demands placed on them by the dual nature of their role—provided the band with a valuable learning experience while further tightening them as a performing unit. "It was really fun for us as musicians to figure out what their songs needed and what we needed to contribute to them," says Lipkins. "Our job was to add that certain energy that the Indigos with a full band have always had, and we were freaked out at first because we had to do justice to their songs, some of which they'd been playing for 20 years. Happily, we got a very positive response from their fans." Their fan base continues to grow as evidenced by a Kickstarter campaign to finance the record which exceeded expectations, almost doubling the goal.

The Shadowboxers' relationship with the Indigos indirectly led to their hook-up with drummer/producer Brady Blade, who'd played on four of the girls albums; the in-demand veteran has also worked with the likes of Emmylou Harris, Steve Earle, Buddy Miller and Dave Matthews. For their all-important debut album (following an eponymous 2011 EP), the band, together with drummer Jaron Pearlman and bassist Ben Williams, traveled to Shreveport, Louisiana, in March 2012, for a breakneck schedule of recording at Blade Studio, with Chris Bell (U2, Erykah Badu, Destiny's Child, Earth, Wind & Fire) engineering. "We had to be very confident in the decisions we were making, because we didn't have any second chances," Lipkins points out. "We gained trust in Brady, and he in us, very quickly, which was essential under those circumstances."

"Brady's vibe and outlook on recording was such a breath of fresh air for us," says Hoffman. "We know each other's playing really well, and we wanted to capture the feeling of a band playing in a room together. In that sense, Brady was perfect for us. His production approach is all about feel and groove and soul—and his belief in our ability to record the majority of the record live to tape was exactly what we were looking for."

Working fast, live off the floor, the band managed to consistently bang out inspired takes. "We'd been playing most of these songs live for over a year, so we had a very good idea of how we wanted them to sound," Hoffman points out. "We only did three full takes for 'Vienna,' and the third take is exactly what you hear on the record. For 'Love on This Side,' we ended up recording the acoustic guitar and the vocals all live, which was a nightmare from a mixing perspective, but there's an element of rawness on most of these tracks that couldn't have been captured in an overdub setting. Brady was in the live room with us during takes dancing or playing tambourine or singing at the top of his lungs—the guy is totally crazy—but it helped us all to relax, to forget we were in a studio doing a take, and really lose ourselves in these songs."

The intriguingly titled *Red Room* isn't an homage to *The Shining* or some winkingly ironic riff on *Fifty Shades of Grey*; rather, it's a reference to the basement of the house Hoffman, Lipkins

and Schwartz lived in for three years during college, which they used as their rehearsal space. “The basement had a fluffy red carpet, so we very creatively called it the red room,” Lipkins explains. “It’s where most of the songs on the record were conceived and worked out, so it made perfect sense to us to call it *Red Room*.”

“This album represents the starting point for us,” he continues. “It’s diverse but unified, and it’s a record with a lot of bravado. What I like about this album is that’s what you get when you see us live,” adds Lipkins.

Given what The Shadowboxers have pulled off on their scintillating debut album—as well as the skillfulness, confidence and ambition that exude from every note and measure, there’s little doubt that *Red Room* will be but the first in a series of musical milestones for this immensely promising group.