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Makar Brings New York, Home

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By Louise Parker (Contributor) | May 17, 2016 | 12:34pm

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Makar is a duo that have been breaking through the sea of Indie bands in New York City. Since 2002, they have been charming audiences with their vibrant brand of Indie-Folk that is noteworthy and delightful, as musicians Mark Purnell and Andrea DeAngelis find their heart and soul in their songs.

Earning a Top 10 spot on The Deli Magazine's Top 300 NYC Indie Bands, the group impress with their latest release, *Funeral Genius*. 2016 sees big things in store for the band, as Makar is set to release their third record, *Fancy Hercules*. We caught up with Makar in New York, as they share their thoughts for 2016.

Having released your latest record "Funeral Genius" a little while ago, how would you say your upcoming venture is a departure from the last record? Or would you consider it a continuation?

Mark: Our third full length album, *Fancy Hercules*, is a departure from *Funeral Genius* in that it definitely veers into weirdest Makar album yet territory with the addition of whacky musical theater musings, songs about insomnia, depression, brain tumors, the meaning of time, family problems, the old ball and chain, a reworking of Devil in a Dream and very strange horror film/Mars Attacks type chords. Not to mention an examination of the myth of Hercules and how he slaughtered his whole family as our title track. We're also planning on doing this album acoustically. No drums, no bass, just piano, guitar and vocals, so that's a huge and exciting departure for us. It's Makar stripped down to the bare essentials, which is scary because you wonder if radio will care that there is very little production, but it's just how we want to record this one, especially the song, Devil in a Dream, which has been reworked with a big chorus and more structure than the first time around on *Funeral Genius*, when we recorded it on a hand held recorder in the dark attic of

Andrea's parent's house with Robert Johnson's hell hounds on our trail.

Andrea: It's freaky that we're planning this new album as just being us. It feels both very vulnerable and empowering. We'll see how it goes, we just started recording a couple months ago. We have other plans in place if recording at home (in our kitchen and coat closet to be exact) doesn't quite pan out or our neighbors hire hit men. I'll be so proud if *Fancy Hercules* does remain just us, only our names on the liner notes. Because really that's always been the core of MAKAR, while other people come and go, Mark and I remain. Being the sole contributors will also quell my imposter fears (a fear that many artists have especially women). And honestly, we've only played these songs acoustically so it would be a little disorienting to add bass and drums. But recording is always such a different mythological beast to wrangle than live performances. As a continuation of *Funeral Genius* we do revisit some of our familiar themes more in-depth on *Fancy Hercules*. *Belong Here* talks about not sleeping, but in *Fancy Hercules*, our song *I'm Alright* is a full-on ode to insomnia. The lingering malignancy of depression from our song *Funeral Genius* manipulates the ending of our new song *Love and Confusion* and erupts into a whole fight against it in *Devil Don't Do Me In*. We also re-visit *Devil in a Dream*. We were never satisfied with our efforts in trying to reproduce the lofi outtake on *Funeral Genius* so we re-imagined the song entirely and called it *Part II* in the upcoming album. So there are always similar themes and quirks we circle back to and explore in new ways.

One element that intrigued me about the band, is the band's strong and prominent vocals. Is that an element we will be hearing more of on the upcoming record?

Mark: Thank you and yes, we will definitely be showcasing the vocals even more this time around. On *Funeral Genius*, as well as our debut album, *99 Cent Dreams*, we mixed the songs so that the vocals were just like any other instrument in the band. Our philosophy is that every element of a song is just as important as every other element, so we mix everything into one unified sonic force. Each element should be discernible and not get lost, but at the same time be a part of a greater whole. Instrumental socialism. However, this time we're going to put the vocals out front so the lyrics can be heard and understood more clearly, which shouldn't be a problem with the spare production of guitar and piano.

Andrea: Vocals are always nerve-racking because recording them is so different from performing live. Some intangible quality gets stripped in that long cable to the mic. And you become hyper sensitive. You're aware of every little thing (especially when you're sequestered in your MacGyvered coat closet/isolation booth). You hear everything, every imperfection, every shiver of anxiety, every time you swallow. It feels as though you're on an alien planet running out of oxygen in your suit. But you're afraid to take off your helmet and try to breathe or maybe that's just the claustrophobia talking? By recording at home, it really allows us to hone in on the vocals. There is no ticking clock in our heads as in a traditional studio and we won't drive the engineer to drink with our obsession to get each song right. And singing is always nerve-racking (at least for me). Before MAKAR, I never imagined singing or even playing in a band. I stopped playing guitar at twelve for various adolescent gothic reasons although wherever I moved to I always brought my student classical guitar even if I just kept it in the closet. It's very funny that I'm going back in the closet to record my guitar and vocal parts, but there's something freeing about being in that unexpected tiny space. It feels especially safe to record the vocals, which tend to be the most vulnerable and honest parts of a song.

When it comes to writing that initial instrumentation, what influences or inspirations have been swirling around your head while creating the new record?

Mark: Ah, Hercules, so strong, so fancy, and yet no one focuses on the fact that he slaughtered his entire family. Yet Hera put a spell on him that made him go crazy and do just that. Our latest album's title track, *Fancy Hercules*, is a re-imagined Hercules in a blues song living as a hobo/vagrant tramp following the train lines, trying to come to terms with what he's done, circling the void, which is illustrated by the weirdest chord in Makar history D7b5, rarely used in music at all, but of course Makar had to bring it out of hibernation. The train is gonna come means he's going to pay for his crimes and penny on the track felt like a natural addition, an urban legend that a penny placed on the tracks will derail a train. It doesn't, but still seems to be a potent part of modern mythology. *Fancy Hercules* is not a concept album, but strangely, many songs can be seen as an extension of Hercules' tormented psyche. *I'm Alright* is a song about insomnia which he undoubtedly suffers from, living with the guilt of his actions. Andrea suffers from insomnia as well, and wrote this song out of pure frustration. *Devil in a Dream* could be seen as the harpies on his trail much like the hellhounds on Robert Johnson's. *Devil Don't Do Me In* is about depression, which he feels over losing his family. *Time Flies* is the first song Makar ever wrote and talks about the void again and wanting to see the end of night, which surely Hercules hoped to see after his 12 labors were completed. *Ridge Rider* is about a fictional character riding along a mystical and haunted ridge in search of meaning and redemption, but could easily be Hercules doing the same, all inadvertent, yet subconscious connections, which aided in choosing the songs for this album.

Andrea: I have never seen it this way, as an extension of Hercules' psyche. It might be a stretch but I'll let Mark stretch it. It is a very emotional and blues-infused album for sure. One of the songs, *I'm Glad*, is about my relief that my mom recovered from a brain tumor. But the album title came from a strange place, a grocery store on the lower east side. It was named *Fancy Hercules* or at least that's how I read it, sometimes I misread things. Like a sign in an antiques store in New Jersey that said 'We Buy Antiques', I misread as 'We Buy Angels'. So the title of the album came from that mis-seeing. For the longest time we only had the music for the song. Then the words came from the title. It's funny our first album, *99 Cent Dreams*, was also inspired by a store name in Hackensack and that title track sprang up around the same. Sometimes a title is all you need to inspire the lyrics. My poetry works like that as well.

Andrea, as someone who dives deep into the world of poetry, how does that effect your lyrics? How does it help the songs come alive?

Andrea: I think as a poet, you become used to phrases floating around in your head or fascinating you as you drive past a store with a name that snags your vision. I think I will always consider myself a poet first because that's how my mind works. I actually think it's how most people's minds work because why have so many people written poetry at some point in their lives? Because it's natural and I think it's the language of the present. Poetry records a moment, a feeling more so than any other written medium in my humble opinion. And songwriting is a natural offspring of poetry because when I'm writing poetry I also think about how the words sound and that's musical as well as rhythmical even if it isn't a poem that rhymes.

My most successful poems also contain a strong visual element so when I write lyrics I try to see the story. But lyrics and poetry can also be very different and almost oppositional to each other. Like I'll just go off on a tangent and Mark definitely uses his keen editorial eye and red pen machete to shape and chop down my song ideas. Sometimes I think of songs in a too non-structural way like forgetting a chorus and Mark has to reign me in.

Because of poetry I think of other ways to say something to get to the core, surprising combinations and I've become a word nerd.

What can you tell us about the making of the new record? How long did it take to write and record? Did you record the album on your own, or was there a producer involved? When are you looking to release the album (if you'd like to share)?

Mark: The recording of *Fancy Hercules* is going on as we speak. It's going to be our most indie album yet as everything is being recorded in our home studio using our Digi 001 pro tools setup on the last Gateway computer in existence. Yes, it's from 2002, but the little bundle of outdated tech goodness is Makar's lucky charm. We haven't even replaced the huge Trinitron monitor that weighs a thousand pounds with a flat screen because we used it to record our first two albums and it's too dear. The way we create albums is to write for a year, rehearse for a year, then record for a year. We always record, produce and mix the albums ourselves, going into a professional studio only to get the bass and drums down so our neighbors don't shoot us. Then we do all the piano, guitar and vocals at home, as well as the artwork. When we've obsessed over it long enough, we send it all to Discmakers to master and manufacture. We're looking to release *Fancy Hercules* in the Fall of 2016 on vinyl and CD as well as every digital corner of the universe!

Being in New York, there are certainly a lot of great places to play. What are your favorite venues to perform at and why?

Andrea: Recently, I've really enjoyed playing Leftfield on Ludlow, it's a small club on the Lower East Side and it feels like family playing there, you feel protected by the intimacy. We also really enjoyed playing St. Paul's Lutheran Church for Voices at Brooklyn gig paired with the organizers from Worker's Justice Project. It was great to participate in something so important (addressing racial and economic injustice that day laborers and domestic workers face in their jobs) and larger than ourselves. And we loved playing the historic Pyramid Club. First, we love going there to boogie down on eighties night and secondly, such awesome acts like Nirvana and Red Hot Chili Peppers also played shows there. The sound was amazing.

Mark: So many have closed as the rents in NYC have gone insane, but the ones still around that we've loved playing at are Pianos, Knitting Factory, Pyramid, Freddy's Backroom, An Beal Bocht, Local 269, Leftfield, R Bar, Lovcraft. Places we loved playing that closed were CBGBs, Galapagos, Bar East, The Hook, Kenny's Castaways and Luna Lounge.

What would you say, as a band, you are looking to accomplish with your music, as well as the upcoming record?

Mark: We hope to create a powerful album that connects with listeners on many levels and gets them thinking in different ways, and to do that with just piano, guitar and two vocals. We've never put out an acoustic album before, and even though we've been playing out acoustically for the past few years, I still think of us as a full on rock band with drums and bass. It's like we've been moonlighting as an acoustic duo or going solo from our own band even though Andrea and I are the band and write all the songs. It's nerve-racking to be so exposed, to not have the power of the drums and bass and all the cool sounds and musical lines they add to our songs, but it's also been a growing experience for Andrea and me as we have to rely on ourselves and fill in all that space that was formerly inhabited by the drums and bass...or not. Like a very wise person once said music is what's between all those notes man.

Andrea: I still dream we'll get a Grammy someday even with an album we are recording in our apartment in Queens. I want to show people it can be done. Go indie or go home! That the most important thing is that you're writing, performing and recording music. That you're expressing yourself and damn the daily crushing limitations people try to shackle you with. That in music, art and writing you're truly free.

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White Reaper - I Don't Think She Cares



Chris Thile and Michael Daves - 20-20 Vision



Phosphorescent - If Drinkin' Don't Kill Me

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