

el Jesus de Magico

Saviors of local rock scene?

Chad Rutan

Some bands practice in garages, basements or attics. Columbus group el Jesus de Magico practices in a funeral home.

The business has been in the family of Michael Patrick O'Shaughnessy, drummer for el Jesus, for decades. He gave a tour of the building, and although most know what to expect from such a place, some aspects are hard to wrap the mind around.

There was still a small amount of dried blood on the gleaming-white porcelain embalming table.

In the same building as the caskets, a dilapidated 70s hearse and sometimes even the deceased, el Jesus' conglomeration of amps, drums, mics, guitars and synths sit pulsing out astrological sounds drenched in reverb and effects.

The band is composed of Jon Witzky on vocals, Sarah Yetter on bass, O'Shaughnessy on drums, David Capaldi on guitar, and Tony Allman on "parchment farm," described as a slew of synthesizers, effects and sound generators.

On the whole, el Jesus is a band of mystery and ambiguity from their history and influences to their sound, live shows and practice space.

A savior is born

El Jesus de Magico formed about five years ago. O'Shaughnessy, Allman and Witzky were in a band called The Magnificent Tallboys, but after falling apart, el Jesus evolved. From the beginning, Allman said it was a collective effort, with no single person formally starting the entity.

"We were a stripped-down guitar band that fell apart and then we decided to get weird," O'Shaughnessy said. "Our sound is the resonant sound from the root cellar of a funeral home."

Yetter played with the band a few times, but did not formally until two-and-a-half years ago.

"The whole idea of the band was to create a new mythology," O'Shaughnessy said.

They are self-described as having an organic tinge to their music; a "post-primitive" group that does not enjoy the term psychedelic, but cannot rule it out completely. Organic? Post-primitive? Psychedelic?

"Or just a hot dog and a handshake," Allman said nonsensically describing the band's sound.

The hymns

As for writing and performing songs, the band is picky when it considers what is "good" and what is considered the "final product." They describe their songwriting process as a democratic trial-and-error process.

"If you listen to our music, you would never think that it takes us as long as it weirdly does to make it," Allman said. "We run through songs over and over and over again, and probably half the time just ditch whatever we're doing."

The band takes little bits of the music they listen to, uses them as inspiration and forms them into Frankenstein's monster, Capaldi said. Yet consciously, the band does not try to imitate anything they have heard.

"It's all over the map," Yetter said. "We were all listening to this Yoko Ono record for a while and maybe that inspired some of our music - probably not."

Wandering apostles

El Jesus has been to Texas music festival South by Southwest twice. Although they said it was a fun experience, they did not think SXSW helped them gain exposure and it seemed to be more hassle than it was worth. They said the driving (or lack thereof because of traffic and road shutdowns) was horrible and they played in venues that did not suite their sound.

The group also toured the country and weathered strange events along the way. They drove through a wildfire in Montana, survived a tornado in Minnesota and were attacked by an army of cockroaches in a cheap motel.

"It seems no matter where we go, something strange happens," Yetter said.

Locally, el Jesus said they play 95 percent of their shows at Carabar on Parsons Avenue and Cafe Bourbon Street on Summit Street. Whether they think they are a large entity in the Columbus music scene open to interpretation.

"We're like a well-known hooker," Allman said.

The band sees a strong and diverse music scene in Columbus, but also sees a limited amount of people willing to experience it.

"Things happen in Columbus, you know? And wasting your time with cornhole and beerpong - that's not it," O'Shaughnessy said.

El Jesus has four releases: one vinyl record, one CD and two tapes. The vinyl EP was recorded in the funeral home and aptly titled "Funeral Sessions EP."

"There are definitely some ghosts on that album," O'Shaughnessy said.

As for the future of the band, it seems another hazy fog waiting to clear. They said enjoying what they do and having creative control over their output is more important than making money.

"What are your expectations when you play music?" Capaldi said. "Are they to be famous, whatever that means, pay the bills and s***... or just to be able to play the music you want to play?"

In short, el Jesus is an elusive, obscure monster lurking Columbus, and as for the blood in their practice spot, Allman said it is just something you get accustomed to.

"It's always there," he said. "I don't think it comes off."