

Deleted Scenes

Young People's Church of the Air

Sockets; 2011

By

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On their 2009 debut, *Birdseed Shirt*, *Deleted Scenes* demonstrated a light touch with heavy thoughts. The quartet-- split evenly between Washington, D.C. and Brooklyn-- leavened moody tunes about addiction and faith with dreamy sonics and a sweetly self-effacing sense of humor. On the album's redemptive, reverb-drenched climax, "Get Your Shit Together for the Holidays", they even managed to pull off some classic Christmas mixtape fare: "Cheer up, take some medication/ Keep your shit together for a couple days," sang songwriter/guitarist Dan Scheuerman, offering warbly comfort to anybody who's had to scrub-up and head back home from a life where things aren't exactly up to mom's smell test.

Two years later, the follow up, *Young People's Church of the Air*, proves an even fuzzier-headed happening. It's a lyrically honest but sonically self-conscious record. Scheuerman lays out the bumps and bruises while the band obscures his confessions in a haze of white noise. Everything sounds faded, far away, and lightheaded. But, deep down beneath the digital grot, the album strikes an undeniably redemptive tone.

That said, it kicks off with a song about death, the rumbling, double-kick drum driven "A Litany for Ms. T". It's a song about making peace with the passing of friends and family off to what is, from Deleted Scenes' perspective, a better place. "Hallelujah, I'm home," Scheuerman wails, just before the song explodes with woozy synthesizer samples in an indie rock approximation of absolution. But the guy who needs the spiritual leg up may be Scheuerman himself. Even more than *Birdseed Shirt*, *Church of the Air* struggles with issues surrounding recovery. Drugs-- prescription or recreational-- are woven into the gauzy textures of the music as well as the lyrics. On "Nassau", Scheuerman wearily recalls an island vacation, singing, "Got a long day to recall, the drug deal, the alcohol." His childhood nostalgia isn't over the counter, either. On "The Days of Adderall" he yearns for adolescence, where the ADD medication is conflated with "dad and mom, certainty." Though the subject matter is often highly personal, Deleted Scenes never come off self-absorbed. Scheuerman has a gift for distilling complex thoughts into everyday language. The narrative-- be it drugs, god, love, or apocalypse-- is exotic, but comes off universal. On "A Bunch of People Who Love

"You Like Crazy", the narrator ponders a final ultimatum from his family, arriving at the conclusion, "Nobody here is gonna get your back/ If you turn it down/ They want to see you on the ground." It's the album's noisiest turn, the words rendered nearly unrecognizable amidst churning digital distortion.

Not all of the material is dour. Many of *Church of the Air*'s most affecting moments are love songs. Scheuerman-- who addresses his then-fiancée, now wife, on "Bedbedbedbedbed"-- approaches intimacy with wide-eyed innocence, rather than syrupy sentimentality. "Say please what are we gonna be, if it takes five minutes, waste five minutes with me," he sings on "Burglarizing the Deaf", convincing himself and his significant other to resist over-thinking things.

When the community that surrounded Dischord started to fade during the mid 2000s, D.C. hit a transitional moment. Outside of the hardcore and metal scenes, new groups started to look beyond the beltway for sonic cues. And mostly, they looked toward Brooklyn. Deleted Scenes did, too. On *Birdseed Shirt* it seemed like the beltway was still embedded into their DNA, from the off-kilter approach to rhythm (Q and Not U) to the self-effacing sense of humor and bendy hooks (the Dismemberment Plan).

On *Church of the Air*, the band gets some distance from its hometown-- amping up the atmosphere, playing pitch-shifted guitar arpeggios, and using a heavy-metal double kick to create stuttering rhythms. Sometimes, the heavily affected production of the Spinto Band frontman Nick Krill and longtime producer L. Skell can be off-putting, defusing what would otherwise be big, fist-pump moments. But mostly, *Church of the Air* squats a unique ground between pop and experimental impulses. It doesn't belong wholly to either world. It's an album that seeks to transcend ugliness, both personal and aural. More often than not, it succeeds on both counts.

<http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/15778-deleted-scenes/>