



Audra

By Kambriel

Lead by brothers Bret and Bart Helm, Audra is like a Velvet Underground for the second millennium, blurring the lines between sweetness and depravity, with their own unique brand of storytelling through music. Audra's songs are all up front and brutally honest, stripped down to the core, covering imagery from the darker corners of life as diverse as shoplifting transvestites and romantically adrift, suicidal Ophelias. We were recently lucky enough to witness their first east coast show, and wanted to delve deeper beneath the surface of the minds behind the music.

SENTIMENTALIST: *Audra just got back from Projektfest in Philadelphia, your first show on the East Coast. How would you recount your experiences at both of your performances and the festival as a whole?*

BRET: The Projektfest was one of the best times I've had in my life...I probably got a total of 8 hours sleep the entire time. It was just non-stop fun. Steve Roach was in the room next to ours and in the morning we'd wake up (if we were lucky to get any sleep) and we could hear him through the walls rehearsing. It was just like listening to one of his CDs. I was extremely happy with both of our performances. I remember looking out into the crowd during our show at The Trocadero and there was a guy in the very front who was singing along with every single song of ours...It was hard to come back home after that experience.

SENTIMENTALIST: *After having received such an enthusiastic reaction from the Philadelphia crowds, are you thinking of planning a future east coast tour?*

BRET: Absolutely! At the moment we are working on a few dates in Hollywood, San Francisco, Denver and even Germany, but we have every intention of doing a tour from Chicago to the East Coast.

SENTIMENTALIST: *Audra seems equally adept at playing both all-out electric stage shows, and simpler, more personal, acoustic sets. What do you find most appealing in each of these forms of musical expression and performance?*

BRET: The acoustic shows are intimate, like doing a show in your own living room. I think it's really impressive to be able to take any song from your record and play it with only an acoustic guitar and a voice. Bart and I have probably performed acoustically as many times as with the full band, so that's why we are really comfortable with it... But nothing beats being on stage with the band.

SENTIMENTALIST: *Some of David Bowie's legendary anthems seemed to be*

a running theme at ProjektFest's acoustic shows, with Judith's Christopher David's "Ziggy Stardust", The Mirror Reveals' "Heroes", and your own rendition of "Space Oddity" which really did justice to the original. Your voice matched Mr. Bowie's own range and emotions so well that if one closed their eyes, they wouldn't have known it was a cover! What, if any affect has Bowie's music had on your own, and what is it about him that first captured you and continues to draw you into his music?

BRET: What first captured me was that voice! His vocal range is just incredible. But to me, the most inspiring thing about Bowie is that he didn't just write good singles, he wrote incredible albums that were each different from the previous one. The popular single off of the *Diamond Dogs* album was Rebel Rebel, which is a great song, but people who just bought the single wouldn't have heard the beauty of "Sweet Thing," "We Are The Dead", or "Big Brother." As an artist that is what I want to achieve. I don't want to just write one song that everybody likes and focus my attention on writing another one to match. For us, it's all about trying to make a great record, where every song could be your favorite...

SENTIMENTALIST: *What was your experience collaborating with Black Tape for a Blue Girl for their album "The Scavenger Bride" like--Was it different for you working with other musicians?*

BRET: A few months before I went out to New York to record the songs with Sam, he sent me a demo CD with the songs he wanted me to sing, complete with lyrics and melody. I had never recorded on anyone else's album before so I was kind of nervous and didn't know what to expect working with another person...Sam is a really great guy and gave me a lot of freedom to try different things out. It was cool to just be a singer and go into the studio and record. I think the new Black Tape album is fabulous and I'm very pleased with the songs I performed on.

SENTIMENTALIST: *Your new album "Going to the Theatre" describes the changes involved in different characters lives which brings them from childhood into adulthood. Can you relate some experiences from your own childhood that you feel led you to music and where you find yourselves today?*

BRET: When we were kids growing up in Chicago, we used to sit around in the front room and our dad would play us Frank Sinatra records. That is probably my earliest memory of music. I look back at my childhood a lot and there are a lot of memories that inspire my writing. The new album definitely focuses on how people turn out because of the things that we experienced as kids. Layla, (my girlfriend), and I were just talking about this last night, how there are some people who've experienced great tragedies in their life and as a result are really mean and negative towards people. I think that it is such a beautiful thing when the opposite happens, when people in turn treat people just the opposite...

SENTIMENTALIST: *Other bands with sibling musicians who play together, have sometimes said that often there can be a sort of intuitive connection when working together. When you are writing songs, do you have a sense of where the other person seems to want to go with a song without planning it out extensively?*

BRET: Definitely. One time, I wrote a bass line for a new song idea, but couldn't come up with a change. Bart was also working on a song and had a part written. So we got together and played the two parts and they ended up being in the same key and they fit together perfectly and that song is now "Cupid" off of our first record. That kind of stuff happens all the time. We seem to always know what each other is thinking...It's kind of like The Shining except without the blood in the elevator.

SENTIMENTALIST: *Where do you want to take the band and your audience next?*

BRET: We just started playing with two new people, Greg Gibbs (bass) and Jason Farrell (drums). We did our first show in with live drums in about 4 years last week and it was a huge success, so we're going to work on doing more live shows with that format...We're taking it one step at a time, but I'm really looking forward to writing songs for our third album. It'll be interesting to see what we come up with.