

THE RADAR MUSIC

BY STEVE CARTER

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OSO IMPRESSIVE: Ryan Jacobi, Andy Rogers, Lindsey Miller, Adrian Hulet and Chris McQueen

RACE TO THE FINISH *Oso Closo's debut CD is primed to upstage 2007's standouts—once it's ready, anyway*

Today's musical zeitgeist loves to categorize bands by pigeonholing—sorting by genre, subgenre, qualified by sub sub-genre, tweaked by further hair-splitting that reduces a group's identity to an abstraction. With Oso Closo, a disarmingly talented band in the throes of finishing their debut release, this kind of geekish analysis is futile. How do you characterize a band so at odds with both the mainstream and the indie/alt worlds? Fusing self-conscious grandiosity with virtuosity, R&B-informed vocals, nerd rock angst and the lumbering aesthetics of late classic rock, Oso Closo is something new, genre-inclusive enough to define and flagship its own genre. With ambiguous echoes of everyone from Harry Nilsson to 10cc, Johnny Gill to Queen, Procol Harum to Luther Vandross, the band has already established a proprietary musicscape.

"I've always been stirred up musically by anything that feels powerful," vocalist, pianist and songwriter Adrian Hulet acknowledges. "I'm definitely a 'feel' guy; I'm really into big and grandiose... things that just hit me in the chest." Hulet and guitarist/songwriter Chris McQueen formed the band two years ago, drawn together at informal jam sessions while attending the University of North Texas. McQueen was a jazzier, but beginning to suspect that playing in a rock band wasn't as low-brow as he'd previously surmised. The two discovered a shared appreciation of Weezer and Queen, and were soon playing Hulet's freshly-minted songs, laying the groundwork for a band. Enlisting other committed UNT players—Andy Rogers on bass, drummer Ryan Jacobi and guitarist Lindsey Miller, Oso Closo was born. Since those early days, the band's following has built at a precipitous clip thanks to regular gigs, a heavily-hit myspace presence, and rabid word-of-mouth advocacy from the

converted. The only missing piece seems to be the debut CD, *Rest*, delayed only by some final mixing, mastering and finished artwork.

Rest is a surprisingly mature work, highlighting Oso's individual players, Adrian Hulet and Chris McQueen's ambitious tunesmithing, and engineer Ben Hulet's grasp of the big sound. Adrian's impassioned singing takes center stage. Similarly, McQueen's lyrical soloing is revelatory, elucidating chord changes that would daunt most of the guitar-slingers in the neighborhood. While he cites an affection for the work of Queen's Brian May, the Eagles, Boston, George Harrison and others, his influences don't stop at the fretboard. "In a weird way what I'm trying to do comes from [pianist] Keith Jarrett," he admits. "I'm going for a linear, melodic thing, weaving and using motifs, but also developing consistently." Even with his prodigious chops, McQueen strives to play "as few notes as necessary," avoiding philistine flash in lieu of well-considered musical *mots justes*. The tunes on *Rest* run the stylistic gamut from dramatic bombast (*A Song for the Morning*) to fusion-oid pop (*The Friendship Song*) to the circus-esque, lurching waltz of *Sheila*, one of the set's highlights; each of these is embellished with swoopingly astute string arrangements that would do George Martin proud. As a lyricist, Hulet aims toward the universal, explaining, "I like writing about a personal experience, but making it wide enough that after someone listens to the song 20 times they might say, 'hey, you know what? I'm totally going through the exact same thing.' Our hope," he adds, "is to open peoples' ears." They will. ■

Hear Oso Closo for yourself at www.myspace.com/osocloso.