

The Dodos embrace their inner guitar nerds

musicpreview

The Dodos

With *Reading Rainbow*
Tuesday, March 29 at 8:30 p.m.
Starlite Room (10030-102 Street)
\$16 at ticketmaster.ca

DULGUUN BAYASGALAN
Arts & Entertainment Staff

In scientific records, they may be written off as extinct, but on musical records, The Dodos are far from it.

The San Francisco duo has been strumming and drumming a new sound with energetic acoustic records and vibrant live shows since 2005. An unbridled buzz for their fourth album *No Color* has been building since the release of the well-received *Time To Die* three years ago, and the band proved they could live up to the hype at this year's South by Southwest Festival in Austin.

"We noticed during [our] shows that there's always one or two dudes in the audience with the long hair — the nerdy-looking dudes that are rocking out the hardest. We want to make this record for those dudes."

MERIC LONG
GUITARIST/VOCALIST, THE DODOS

On the new record, The Dodos are extending their wingspan and evolving with the addition of the electric guitar to their sound.

"My first guitar was an electric, and the first songs I learned were those '90s grunge bands," lead singer and guitarist Meric Long says. "I'd rip tablatures out of magazines and learn all the songs. I'd just completely forgotten about



it because I spent so much time trying to play acoustic."

The Dodos' previous records feature all-acoustic tunes, a distinct characteristic of most of their songs. Long, now having rediscovered the electric guitar, takes new pleasure in the aesthetic the instrument creates.

"The most fun part of recording [the new album] for me was the time of day when we didn't know what to do, so I would put on an electric guitar and just crap all over the songs with a bunch of riff-y nonsense," he laughs. "But it all ended up working out."

Until now, their shows usually consisted of a simple drum set-up and an acoustic guitar. But The Dodos are currently touring with two electric guitars, which makes for a decidedly heavier gig.

"It's kind of a different band. I think fans and

people are going to be a little surprised when they see us with all the new songs and the new electric sound," Long says. "Regardless of whether [they] will make the jump with us to the new sound that we're having, it's really fun for us, and it sort of reinvigorates the band."

This, however, doesn't mean a departure in musical style or genre for The Dodos. The extensive use of open tunings and quick finger-picking rhythms that fans are accustomed to are still present on the album; the electric guitar parts are mainly for riffs and textural support. Of course, no one knows this better than the guitar nerds for whom the new record has been made.

"We noticed during [our] shows that there's always one or two dudes in the audience with the long hair — the nerdy-looking dudes that are rocking out the hardest. We want to make this

record for those dudes," Long says. "It makes me happy to see those guys at our shows. We want to steer more towards that audience."

Evidently, The Dodos took their time to craft *No Color* to satisfy the most avid of guitar (and drum) nerds.

"We definitely sat with the songs for a long time and tried to let them breathe as much as possible and not force them to do a certain thing," Long explains. "Each one is different, you know. Some of them have been more like bedroom creatures and other ones have been flushed out of just me and [drummer] Logan [Kroeber] playing a bunch and coming back to it later."

Even though time is important, the true secret ingredients to The Dodos' music can be narrowed down to three: "A lot of jam, a lot of ham, and a bit of zan," Long says. "Z-A-N. That's been a popular term with us lately."

Perfect Thing raises more questions than it can answer



DAN MCKECHNIE

theatre review

An Almost Perfect Thing

Directed by Michael Clark
Written by Nicole Moeller
Starring Tess Degenstein, David Ley,
and Frank Zotter

La Cité Francophone
(8627-91 Street)
Runs until April 10 at 7:30 p.m.,
Sunday matinées at 2 p.m.
Student tickets are \$20, Sunday
matinées are 2-for-1, and Tuesday
performances are pay-what-you-can

BRYAN SAUNDERS
Arts & Entertainment Writer

Do we have a right to hear another person's story? Do we have a right to know the truth? And why do we want it so badly? These are the questions that Edmonton playwright Nicole Moeller asks in *An Almost Perfect Thing*.

The play tells the story of Chloe (Tess Degenstein), a girl who has been held captive in her abductor's basement for more than six years. When Chloe, now an 18-year-old, finally escapes, the public and media want to know what happened. What did the man do to her and why? And how come it took her six years to escape?

To the public's anger and dismay, Chloe won't tell. That is, until she meets Greg (Frank Zotter). A washed-up journalist with a personal

connection to Chloe's story, Greg makes a tenuous deal with Chloe to write about her story in his newspaper column, telling little tidbits of her story at a time.

Greg is the only one Chloe will talk to, and his exclusive columns become the focus of international attention. However, there are a few problems: Chloe refuses to lead police to her kidnapper Mathew (David Ley) or to share his last name, and consistently lies or fabricates details when telling her story. In what seems to be a case of Stockholm Syndrome, Chloe protects her kidnapper, while Greg — though enjoying all the attention he's getting as a columnist — questions if he can trust her.

While the first 10 minutes of the play start off rather slow, the tension and the intrigue begins to build soon after, and the story really starts rolling.

The audience begins to see that all three characters on stage need each other: all are just as desperate to feel needed and loved. This is most obvious when David, Mathew, and Chloe begin to start and finish each other's sentences — an interesting and tricky narrative device that's tough for any cast to pull off.

As the story develops, Chloe is under more and more pressure to lead the police to Mathew (after all, he might kidnap someone else). As a result, the strain between Chloe and Greg builds and builds, and so too does the humour.

One wouldn't expect a play about a kidnapping to be so funny, but in many poignant moments of truth, the audience has no choice but to laugh at the absurdity of the characters' all too human flaws. Each of the three characters in the play is convinced they are the one in control.

But the script isn't perfect: when the audience sees Chloe as a 12-year-old, her apparent level of maturity and manner of speech are exactly like that of her 18-year-old self, which is hard to swallow. Has she really not changed in six years? Degenstein is also prone to several instances of over-acting, something which quickly wears thin.

Zotter's acting is very good, but his character Greg is shallow and grates on the nerves. Greg comes off more as a narrator than as a character, and he's an annoying narrator at that — his endless soliloquies to the audience are a little too much.

Surprisingly, it's the kidnapper Mathew who really steals the show. Although Mathew is undeniably creepy, it's hard not to empathize with him as a damaged and deeply hurting human being. Ley's interpretation of the character is spot-on.

Although *An Almost Perfect Thing* deals in heavy subject matter, the finished product doesn't quite move, change, or satisfy the audience in any big way. Moeller has managed to craft an interesting story about abduction and the media, but in the end, all the questions the script poses are left unanswered.