

CITY LIFE



# Finish Ticket strikes a chord in the music scene



L - R: Gabe Stein, Michael Hoyo, Brendan Hoyo and Alex DiDonato of Finish Ticket.

Anna Larina / Skeleton Key Photography

By Kirsten Coachman

It's been quite an exciting year already for local Bay Area-based indie pop-rock band, Finish Ticket. This past February, the band followed up their 2010 EP, "Shake A Symphony," with the release of their first full-length record, "Tears You Apart." The band collaborated with producer Pierre de Reeder (Rilo Kiley) in L.A. on a number of tracks, including "Doctor," "Catch You On My Way Out" and "Take It Out."

In addition to touring, the band played during this year's SXSW and performed on the Pepsi Soundcheck Local Band stage at Live 105's BFD. Last month, they opened for Billy Idol at the Mountain Winery and just this past weekend, they played Alice 97.3's Summerthing 2013 at Golden Gate Park, alongside Ed Sheeran and Sara Bareilles.

Before one of their recent shows in downtown San Jose, I had the opportunity to sit down with the band, Brendan Hoyo (vocals/guitar), Alex DiDonato (guitar), Michael Hoyo (bass), Gabe Stein (drums) and Nick Stein (keys), to talk about how growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area has influenced their sound, how they approached the making of

"Tears You Apart" differently from "Shake A Symphony" and what they have planned for the rest of the summer.

**Q: With three of you (Brendan, Michael and Alex) being in the band together since high school, what has kept you guys committed to making music together over the years?**

**Alex DiDonato:** It's fun. It's the most fun we could have.

**Brendan Hoyo:** We went off to college for a little bit, and it was still really fun and we really missed it. But then in our first year of college, I guess it

**AD:** Hugely. We grew up listening to local bands and going to all the local shows. Bottom of the Hill in San Francisco was one of the venues we frequented the most, because we were in love with so many local bands and the whole music scene in the Bay Area. I guess when we started out, we just really wanted to be a part of that as much as we could and just to strive to be as good as that scene was at the time when we were in high school. I think it still influences us, probably more than most.

**"I don't like starting with lyrics, because I just feel like it really limits the potential of the melody, but then again someone could argue that it limits the potential of the lyrics, but I feel like it's a little easier to still get the lyrics and fit it to a good melody."**

Brendan Hoyo  
VOCALS/GUITAR

was your (Alex's) second, we did Not So Silent Night. We were really lucky, and we realized that maybe we should consider taking it seriously. We stopped doing school very recently to pursue this.

**Q: How has growing up in the Bay Area influenced your overall sound?**

**Q: What is your guys' creative process like when working on a record — do you usually start with the lyrics first or the melody for the song first?**

**BH:** It really varies with every song. I guess I don't usually write lyrics first,

because I feel like that would limit the melody. And I was always sort of a melody guy and with the most recent record, I really got into lyrics. I don't like starting with lyrics, because I just feel like it really limits the potential of the melody, but then again someone could argue that it limits the potential of the lyrics, but I feel like it's a little easier to still get the lyrics and fit it to a good melody. So that's generally how it starts.

**AD:** Usually the whole song process, Brendan usually starts writing the basis of the song, like, the first verse, the chorus or something like that. And then once he feels good enough about that, the melody, he takes it to the rest of us and we hash out the rest of the song from there into our individual parts. A song could probably change like 20 times.

**Q: Is there a specific song on the album that evolved over time before the final recording stage?**

**BH:** There's a lot.

**Michael Hoyo:** "Pockets."

**BH:** "Pockets" went through so many phases.

**AD:** "Killing Me" went through a lot of phases too. There's only a couple really that were done right away.

**BH:** I think "Pockets" went

through a big change. That one had too much of an island feel, at first, and then we hated it and we couldn't figure out how to fix it. And we were like, "Aw, this isn't going to work out." And then a little bit before going into the lyrics, but I feel like it's a little easier to still get the lyrics and fit it to a good melody. So that's generally how it starts.

**Gabe Stein:** That was like the first song I ever wrote full drums to.

**Q: Did you approach making "Tears You Apart" any differently from how you approached making "Shake A Symphony?"**

**MH:** I think every time we've worked on recordings, it's been different.

**AD:** This is our first full-length album, so it was definitely a transition of trying to get that many songs in, deciding which songs we wanted to keep on the album and which ones we wanted to save.

**BH:** Yeah, and half of the record we did with Pierre de Reeder. We'd go in a room and start from just playing live together and then we'd go back and overdub some stuff, but we'd always work off of the original live tracking. On our first EP,

CITY LIFE *Finish Ticket*

one of the complaints that we did get was that it wasn't the same as our live show. And we've always been much more energetic and fun at our live shows and we could never get that in the recordings. We really tried with this one and I think it worked out. With Pierre we just went in and did it pretty much live. I think it made a big difference and that's what I like most about the record. And that's definitely a very different approach for us. I'd say, I think we still want to do that every time and get closer to getting the live sound captured. That was a big goal on this album.

**Q: Some of the tracks on this record have a bit of angst to them; what inspired the darker and moodier tracks, like "Bring The Rain"?**

**BH:** "Bring The Rain," that one is kind of about when we were going off to college. When I first got there, I wasn't exactly thrilled. I was, at first, happy, but within the first month, I started making some friends, but the first month was pretty rough for me. The guys I was hanging out with; I love them, they're awesome guys, but it was weird to get used to it. I found more friends in the music department and then it evened out. That song really started just from that first month of college for me, when I kind of wasn't ready for it and I kind of felt like this wall was going up between my previous life in high school and this new life with just weird friends and stuff. The chorus is metaphorical, I guess, but it's kind of about feeling really far away from home and feeling detached from my former life in high school.

**Q: You guys have been receiving airplay on Live 105 — where were you the first time you heard your song on the radio and what was your reaction?**

**BH:** I was in our guest room. I think it was "Confidence." I turned it up super loud. We were in the first competition to play Not So Silent Night. We didn't win that year, but they played us on Live 105, and I was super excited. I went upstairs and just blasted it super loud. It was awesome.

**GS:** Yeah, mine was the Christmas song.

**Nick Stein:** Mine too. I didn't know it was being played.

**GS:** Yeah, I didn't even know it was being played. Nick got in the car and was like, "I heard your song on the radio." I was like, "What?"

**NS:** "I've heard this guitar line somewhere. Where is it from?"

**AD:** I remember driving

back from one of our shows the first year I was in college, they were still in high school, so I would drive back from UC Santa Cruz every weekend to play shows. I remember driving back to Santa Cruz on Sunday night and I heard one of our songs and it was just like, "Yeah! A successful weekend!" I think that's the first time I ever heard one of our songs.

**Q: What is your guys' favorite track to play off of "Tears You Apart"?**

**"We also grew up going there when we were a lot younger, so being able to play [Bottom of the Hill] was a huge stepping stone for us."**

Michael Hoyo  
BASS

**GS:** "Bring The Rain."

**BH:** Yeah, I think "Bring The Rain" is mine.

**AD:** "In The Summer" is fun, too. "Pockets." But "Bring The Rain" is a good rager.

**BH:** I think the live version of "Bring The Rain" is pretty different than the recorded version. The recorded version is much more tame compared to the live one. I mean, we're playing the same stuff, it's just way louder. It's just much more fun.

**Q: So Bottom of the Hill is your favorite Bay Area venue to play — what makes it your favorite?**

**AD:** I think it's our favorite, because everybody there is really nice to us and we've played really good shows there.

**BH:** Really good sound. Really nice staff.

**MH:** We also grew up going there when we were a lot younger, so being able to play there was a huge stepping stone for us.

**BH:** We had a whiteboard at our old practice space and we had that at the top of it — "Play Bottom of the Hill" — in high school and we finally got to do it. Now we've done it like a ton, but back then, that was almost, to us, that was like as far-fetched as getting a record a deal or something. But it happened and it was awesome.

**Q: You guys just played BFD last month and on June 23, you're playing Summerthing — what does it mean to you guys to be able to play these larger radio shows?**

**GS:** BFD was my first concert I ever went to away from my parents in high school and it was really, really exciting and then we got to play it. These radio events and things we've seen that we've seen or at least I've seen for my whole life and have gone to in the Bay Area; it's pretty

exciting to be playing them. **MH:** Summerthing, we've been going to for years now, because it was free. It's cool to be playing it.

**BH:** The fact that they're letting bands like us, smaller, local bands on [the lineup], it's super cool of them.

**Q: Can you tell me a little bit about the music video for "Take It Out"?**

**BH:** We have two [videos] that were made. He (Michael) has one made for "In The

to be cool. We're going to go up to Canada finally. And after that, we're going to the east coast finally, too.

**AD:** And possibly Japan.

**BH:** And possibly Japan. That's a very recent development.

**AD:** But we're really stoked about it.

**BH:** It's gonna be a good rest of the year, I think.

**AD:** We're not just going to tour, we're going to work on new songs, too.

**MH:** Hopefully we're going to go demo in a week.

**BH:** Oh yeah, we might go demo some new songs.

**MH:** And film an actual music video.

**BH:** So we'll film an actual [music video] soon. Probably for "Catch You On My Way Out."

**Q: Last question — how would you sum up your year, so far?**

**BH:** Very awesome. It was just really awesome to get out a full-length finally. The reaction has been great. It got some awesome press. We're starting to see our numbers for the local area shows, not just San Francisco. Like the

one the other day in San Jose, we didn't expect to have all those people up front. That was really awesome. So far, it's been really awesome.

**MH:** Very redeeming.

**BH:** Yeah, let's go with that. Redeeming. We spent so much time on the record. It took a year to get it out. It was done for a few months before we put it out. It was just a long period, a lot of money spent and all that. Finally it's done and we're getting a lot of awesome opportunities because of it. There was all that hard work and it was worth it.

For more information on Finish Ticket and to download their full-length album, "Tears You Apart," check out FinishTicket.com.

*Finish Ticket will be playing The Independent on Wednesday, July 3, as support for The Revivalists. Time: 8 p.m., Cost: \$13 (advance)/\$15 (at the door)*

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