

Stolen Babies Took Time Off and Got Huge

By Linda Leseman

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Earlier this year, Los Angeles cabaret-metal band Stolen Babies played a sold-out show in Colorado. There, frontwoman Dominique Persi was shocked to hear the entire audience finishing her lines for her. It's been six years since their debut record appeared with minimal fanfare, and they hadn't performed outside L.A. in years. But in the interim they've somehow gained a devoted following -- extending to their recently released sophomore album, *Naught* -- which they find ironic.

"We've never heard of a band that got bigger being idle," says bass player Rani Sharone, before correcting himself. "I mean, it's not like we were idle. We were basically nonexistent."

Their music is quirky. They cite Oingo Boingo as their main influence, but their humor resembles a twisted horror cartoon more than '80s pop. If Tim Burton created a metal band, it would sound like Stolen Babies.

The founding members have been playing together since the mid-'90s. Sharone and his twin brother, Gil, met Persi at L.A. County High School for the Arts, where he recruited her for a performance-art troupe called The Fratellis.

While onstage Persi's presence is spellbinding, offstage she is shy. She says that because she was bullied as a teen, her self-consciousness drove her to create her stage costumes -- hybrids of steampunk dresses and goth-meets-harlequin makeup. "I just found that I didn't like my face," she says, "so I used to cover it with masks, and then it turned into a makeup thing."

Costumes and the occasional set piece are remnants of the band's theatrical origins. A major turning point in their sound came when Persi started screaming the lyrics -- with the intent to "destroy" her voice. "I was born with this really thick, rich, vibrato-heavy voice that just sort of developed," she says. "It never expressed what I was feeling correctly."

In 2001, The Fratellis whittled their theater collective down to a rock band and became Stolen Babies. They found their core audience in 2004 at goth clubs like Bar Sinister, and two years later released the full-length *There Be Squabbles Ahead* independently. (It was later licensed by The End Records.) The band toured extensively, opening for Lacuna Coil and The Dillinger Escape Plan, which helped boost their fan base in the mid to late aughts.

And then ... silence. Persi moved to Oakland, and each band member pursued independent projects. "We didn't really think about anybody caring," Sharone says. "We were basically defunct."

But fans were writing to them on Facebook -- not in huge numbers, but with enthusiasm. And so in 2011 Sharone and Persi began collaborating on the songs for *Naught*. When they booked a small tour to premiere the new material earlier this year, most of the shows sold out. Metallica guitarist Kirk Hammett, meanwhile, has taken to wearing a Stolen Babies T-shirt.

While everyone in the band still pursues outside work to make a living, Sharone says they're close to the point where Stolen Babies can become a full-time job. He attributes it to social media as well as good old-fashioned word-of-mouth. "People talk," he says. "Whether they talk shit or whether they praise you, people talk, and word gets around."

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