

Mass Choir resurrects the dance parties of the '90s

musicpreview

Mass Choir

With *Cygnets and Braids*
Thursday, March 31 at 8 p.m.
The Pawn Shop (10549-82 Avenue)
\$8 at Blackbyrd or yeglive.ca

MADELINE SMITH
Arts & Entertainment Editor

The summer hit emerges from an especially potent brand of music. Summer is the time when pop artists bring out the big guns: the most relentless earworms and heaviest dance hooks that are impossible to escape for the entire season. Edmonton-based dance outfit Mass Choir, with one album already under their belt, is working on their next offering that's likely to be released in the fall — but they know the value of a great summer single.

"I've had one-song summers and I love them," keyboardist Jay Burke says.

"Was it Shaggy, 'It Wasn't Me'?" vocalist Mary Hulbert responds.

Everyone bursts out laughing as Hulbert and drummer Brett Henry begin their own rendition of the chorus of the infamous ode to bad

excuses for getting caught red-handed with the girl next door. When it's over, they all look at each other expectantly, then crack up again while bassist Nathan Setterlund attempts to imitate Shaggy's unintelligible singing style.

"Nobody knows the words to that part," Hulbert laughs.

The camaraderie between the members of Mass Choir is obvious, and although they've only been playing together in their current formation for slightly more than a year, they're all on board with their vision for the kind of experience they believe their music should provide. With its full roster of six members — including Matthew Skopyk and Peter Fernandes rounding out the group's vocals — Mass Choir in its entirety is a driving electropop force, combining thick synthesizer riffs, live drums and bass, and powerful back-and-forth male/female vocals.

"I feel that we're bringing a dance party to the Edmonton scene," Henry says. "We're trying to bring back that kind of '90s feel, but at the same time, we're trying to do it with a different twist."

"It really might just be the generation we come from," Burke says of the group's '90s-influenced aesthetics.



SUPPLIED: MARSHALL WATSON

"As far as when you're first becoming a teenager and getting a taste for things — for me, anyway, that was the heyday of *Electric Circus*."

"That constant rhythm is almost hypnotizing," Henry adds. "Even if you're not totally dancing, you're kind of — everybody is moving. That's what it's all about."

Making people move is extremely important for Mass Choir, and the band's primary focus is putting on a dynamic live show. Hulbert, who

also has a theatre background, feels particularly strongly about creating a genuine connection between both the band and the audience, and the band members themselves.

"Where I feel it all really comes alive, when we're all working together, is in the live set," Hulbert says. "It's a 45-minute, make-you-sweat power set. You better have stretched beforehand. But I know — and as flaky as this sounds — I can feel the energy they're giving behind

me. I know that every single person behind me is supporting me."

"And if I catch, out of the corner of my eye, Nathan rocking out so hard on the bass — if I get a little drip of his sweat, I'm like, 'Yeah, he's in it,'" she continues. "There are certain little drum things that Brett does that I know he's totally in it, and I look over at Jay, and I know what part he does. These are things you get to know."

"It's when we play live that the magic happens."

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