

SPOTLIGHT



Chris Chisman

DR. DOG

Fresh faces, familiar places and a newfound urge to have a good time

Dimitri Manos, Eric Slick, Frank McElroy, Scott McMicken, Zach Miller, Toby Leaman

ON THEIR LAST ALBUM, THE MEMBERS of Dr. Dog tried to teach themselves new tricks. They left their familiar Philadelphia practice space and studio, Meth Beach, and enlisted the help of an outside producer. The result was 2010's *Shame, Shame*—an album that, for all its groovy nods to the Beatles and Beach Boys, was uncharacteristically somber. “It was sort of a struggle,” acknowledges bassist and singer Toby Leaman. “We ended up gravitating toward song choices that sounded down, because we were feeling down.”

For its latest, *Be the Void*, the band rediscovered the joys of working from home—especially because there was some fresh blood on hand in the form of two new members, drummer Eric Slick and multi-instrumentalist Dimitri Manos. By the time

work began on the album last summer, the group was re-energized. “Before the last record we had hit a wall in terms of what we were capable of doing in the studio,” Leaman says. “But we’d never done a record with these two before.”

Meth Beach itself also got an overhaul, as the band worked with engineer Nathan Sabatino to outfit the studio with new gear. With its setup thus modernized, Dr. Dog bashed out some 30 songs in about as many days. Leaman and singer-guitarist Scott McMicken handled the bulk of the songwriting, but the six musicians constructed the songs together, coming up with parts as they went. “Previously it would be a couple of us in the studio, and the songs would get built that way,” Leaman says. “This time everybody was there from the get-go.”

The results were immediate. On tunes like “Do the Trick” and “Big Girl,” every guitar riff, piano lick, cowbell ping and sunny “shana-na” vocal fell right into place. “Everyone understood their role immediately and exactly what needed to happen,” Leaman says of the band, formed in Philadelphia 13 years ago. “It’s so satisfying when everyone comes up with their own parts and it gels—plus it’s a great time saver.” Although not without its dark moments—the first two songs are called “Lonesome” and “That Old Black Hole”—*Be the Void* may be the first great feel-good rock record of 2012. “We were really psyched to be playing, having the new guys and everyone feeling really good,” Leaman says. “There’s really no point doing this unless you’re having a good time.”

—Kenneth Partridge

