

Critics' Forum
Film and Music
Catching a Ride on the Revival Express
By Sam Ekizian

There's a new wave approaching, reflecting a reversion to eighties alternative rock sensibilities. This revival has created a resurgence of bands that have broken away from the grunge aesthetic, realigning instead with radio-friendly predecessors. As a result, meandering synth-propelled melodies, often without much relevance, have hijacked the airwaves.

It is in this atmosphere that the Los Angeles based band Aviatic has released its debut full-length album, aptly titled *Arrival*. Aviatic was formed when Sebu Simonian (vocals/keyboard) and Barrett Yeretsian (drums) joined forces in 2004. Simonian brought guitarist Ryan Welker into the fold, while Yeretsian ushered in bass player Clint Feddersen. The quartet seems to have found a unique chemistry evident in its songs and live performances.

On *Arrival*, Aviatic pursues its decidedly quiet groove in the high-gloss, somewhat low-affect style you can hear throughout the rock scene these days, from bands as different as Coldplay, Death Cab for Cutie, Muse and the Shins. While the foregoing may have perfected the template for this sound, Aviatic takes it a step further, pushing beyond the confines of the prototypical alt-rock genre. The band dips much further into classic rock to round out its repertoire, effectively jarring the listener from states of quiet meditation into endorphinic exuberance.

A palpable loneliness runs through Aviatic's themes of remembering, forgetting, longing, losing, and dreaming. Interestingly, although Simonian and Yeretsian are the creative forces behind much of the music, the songs lack any discernable Armenian influence. While this is somewhat personally disappointing, it does not detract from their debut. This is in no small part due to Aviatic's pursuit of the alt-pop poignancy of bands like R.E.M and Radiohead. Simonian himself sings like a resolute version of Michael Stipe, his vocal timbre achy and melancholic while still dry and low-key.

In the moody ballad, "Poor You," Simonian emotes in counterpoint to the slick weave of the acoustic guitar over the rest of the group. Listening closely usually reveals that he's lamenting a relationship. Aviatic embraces the seeming randomness reflected in the social fabric, a central theme of the album. The band does not strive to go beyond this, however. In a recent conversation, Simonian reasoned that, at its core, "all of life is about relationships."

"Goodbye Beautiful Day," the most polished track on the album, is a mid-tempo, well-textured electro-acoustic song that is hypnotically infectious. It begins with a simple piano line, drawing the listener deeper into a gently progressing, layered composition before swelling into a sonic and emotional crescendo.

Another ballad, “Stop Staring,” delves into love and loss. This deliberately undulating track is dominated by Simonian’s fervent vocals. Although a fact that is not lyrically evident, Simonian indicated that the song was written following his sojourn in Armenia and distant encounter with Mount Ararat. This revelation only served to heighten the emotional intensity of the song—particularly in Simonian’s chorus, “stop staring, stop caring.”

“Stroll” shows off Aviatic’s combination of craft and nonchalance, setting an iridescent groove against Yeretsian’s fittingly petulant percussing and Simonian’s melancholy croon, offering in one line, “I’m the one you need to use and abuse.”

“Watching it All” and “Take it Back” are truer to Aviatic’s rock influences, dominated by insistent guitars, rolling, almost military, drums and raspier vocals. In “Shine,” “Schemes” and “Open Door,” the band pushes its sound beyond the buoyant hooks characteristic of other cuts. Guitars ring with passion, drums pound and wheel with controlled irreverence, and vocals intensify.

Arrival never runs out of knockout licks and vocal twists and seems to effortlessly resolve jolts in tune and tempo. The album is also peppered with impressive blasts of staccato, descending guitar riffs and explosive drumrolls.

Aviatic has built a considerable following in the past couple of years. While still not lyrically or sonically mature, the band gets louder and clearer with every performance, without losing the lustrous ambience it continues to refine. *Arrival* nearly lives up to the hype, blending autumnal folk, shambling alternative grooves, and heartbreak harmonies into a fertile and accessible rock album.

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