

PG MUSICIAN INTERVIEW

Die Shiny

This month, we connect with Die Shiny, a local music group based in Pleasant Grove and composed of Callie Crofts and Zac Bryant. Their music is often dark, edgy and intricate, with lush synth-heavy melody lines, attention-grabbing lyrics and unique vocal harmonies that grasp and hold your attention. Die Shiny is beginning to make waves in the local Utah scene, and we are excited to catch up with them to hear about their background, their creative process, and the direction that their music is moving.

Where are you both from?

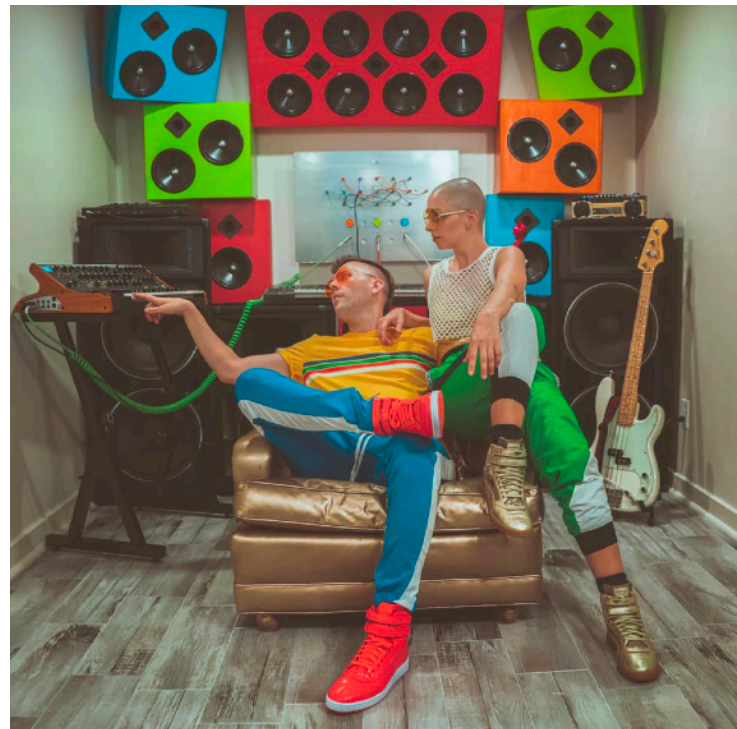
[Zac] I was born in Huntsville, Alabama, but I spent most of my life in Orem. I now live in Pleasant Grove.

[Callie] I'm an Idaho gal, but I've lived in Utah long enough that it feels like home.

What is your earliest memory of music?

[Zac] I remember my sisters practicing the piano when I was probably 3 or 4 years old.

[Callie] My dad's bluegrass band practicing on the back patio in the summertime while I was headed to sleep with an open window. Faint bluegrass with crickets and sprinkler sounds. So vibey.



If you could go to a music concert for any artist or band (dead or alive), who would it be?

[Callie] I could name countless living artists that I hope to see one day, but if I had the opportunity to go back in time and witness an artist who has passed on, it would be Jeff Buckley without hesitation. I've never been so moved by a voice before.

[Zac] I've been to so many concerts, and I've even met one of my all time favorite musicians (it was awkward and weird - I don't recommend it). I don't really have a wishlist anymore. I would love to see Everything Everything, Lettuce, and Louis Cole again. I recently saw Louis Cole's Big Band for the first time, and it absolutely blew my mind. I would be stoked to see any artist perform with that level of showmanship, virtuosity and energy.

What made you want to become involved in music?

[Callie] I grew up in a musical family as mentioned. My father was always playing fiddle, guitar or mandolin around the house and performing in various bands. He brought a travel-sized guitar on every family vacation and played in the car. In my house, if you were walking by at the right moment, he would grab you and make you sing whatever song he happened to be learning at that moment. When I was 9, myself and two of my sisters quite enjoyed these little musical interruptions. So dad started teaching us folk, gospel and Americana songs in three-part harmony and booking little community performances. Our little family band continued for years.

One summer day when I was 12, I was bored and picked up one of dad's guitars. I asked him to teach me something. He taught me 4 chords then went about his business. A few hours later I had written my first song, and songwriting has been my great passion ever since.

[Zac] I was always interested in music as well. I started learning piano at age 6, guitar at age 9, and then drums and percussion at age 11. I even started learning to record music for myself and friends as early as age 16, with nothing more than a basic mixing board and an outdated pro-audio level CD burner that I bought for \$30 from my high school band teacher. I was recording stereo straight to CD.

As far as becoming involved in the music industry, this happened when I was in college. I was aimless and failing horribly at my studies. I eventually dropped out of college and started taking private drum lessons from a very talented drummer that I looked up to, and that's when I became excited about the idea of going pro. At that point I was practicing drums for hours every day and looking for every opportunity to play live and record.



What hobbies or interests do you have outside of music?

[Zac] I really enjoy the outdoors - climbing, skiing, and camping are some of my interests.

[Callie] I love rock climbing, gardening, camping... connecting with the earth any chance I get. I'm also a reiki practitioner and love to facilitate emotional healing.

What instruments do you play?

[Callie] Singing and playing the bass is my favorite combo, but I also play guitar and synthesizers.

[Zac] I play drums and guitar mainly, but I also play bass, synths, and I sing.

Do you play with a band or group today?

[Callie] Die Shiny is our original project and baby, but I also play bass alongside Zac on the drums in a punky garage band out of American Fork called Mowth, as well as a Pink Floyd tribute band out of SLC called The Discographers. It's a delight to be in a rhythm section with him and share so many projects with my favorite person.

We also produce the "Crofts Family Band" in our studio, although we don't perform live as my father and siblings don't live in Utah. It's a passion project for me to write and arrange songs inspired by my musical upbringing and record with my family whenever they can make it to my studio. We even have a Christmas album that hit top ten on Billboard charts!

How would you describe the music that you play or create today?

[Callie] Die Shiny is a commentary on absurdity. The fact that we somehow came to exist with brains that both care about existing AND know that our death is certain...that's hilarious. It's absurd and awful and wonderful. That's the idea behind our project - I want to convey all of the complex emotions behind that experience and feel them deeply with our listeners. Our lyrics can be cerebral, comedic, and sometimes heartbreaking. Our sound is dark and edgy with influences of industrial, goth and new wave, but there is a huge element of catchy pop-sensibility with melodies that get stuck in your head.

[Zac] Die Shiny is all of the stuff I like to hear in music. It can be complex at times, it combines electronic and organic sounds, and the vocal melodies and lyrics really draw you in. When I was younger, I always gravitated towards music with a bit of a darker sound or tone to it and that had deep lyrical content. So I feel at home creating a sound that compliments Callie's songwriting, which always seems to scratch the itch I have for deep, "feeling" music.

What does your creative process look like?

[Zac] Callie will bring a song to the table, usually with lyrics and melody already figured out. We usually start with a bass line or a chord structure, and then we start exploring additional ideas from there. It's usually pretty clear what the song is after we flesh out some ideas. Then, it's just a matter of honing it and getting all of the elements really dialed in. Sometimes it feels like a maze with dead ends, but the great part is you can always back up and try other directions until you find the way out.

[Callie] We've been creating together for a decade, but this has been the first phase where we have a fully equipped studio at home. Zac is an incredibly talented sound engineer. This has given us so much creative freedom. I write a full or partial song in my phone's voice memo app, then I take what's good and we make a demo in our studio. Both of us have ideas for bass, synth and guitar parts. We feel free to tweak each others' ideas without offending, which is really nice. When a song seems generally finished, we give it time to sink in and question whether we've made it as awesome as possible. We sometimes listen to our favorite artists and dissect what it is that makes their music speak to us so deeply, and that gives us new production ideas all the time.

Which of your songs is your absolute favorite?

[Callie] Lungs. It is my belief system in a song. It's deeply spiritual to me, and doubles as a meditative mantra.

[Zac] Lungs. I felt like we really found our sound with this one. I love the way it builds, how all the different elements play off of each other seamlessly, and it has a really satisfying climax at the end.

What's next for you with your music?

[Callie] We are creating our second EP right now. Our first 4 EPs create a larger concept together that will unfold as they are released. We plan to play local shows this year and hit the digital marketing pretty hard so that we can gain a larger audience and eventually tour. Our next show is May 7th at the International Artist Lounge in SLC.

What advice would you give to anyone in our community that is interested in songwriting or making music?

[Zac] It's essential in today's music industry to be able to record yourself. It takes time to understand the tools and techniques of recording and production, so my advice would be to start learning as early as possible. It will expand what you think is possible with your music, you'll encounter fewer road blocks, and you will save thousands of dollars in the long run.

[Callie] I could talk for days on this subject, but my initial advice is to connect with other creators and see them as your allies rather than your competition. I've witnessed a lot of nasty passive-aggression and egotistical insecurity over the years in our music scene, but I've also witnessed pockets of true community. The spirit of music is the freedom and joy of creativity, and as artists we shouldn't cut that spirit off with competitive pettiness. Someone else's success will never take your opportunity or potential away. A rising tide lifts all ships.



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