



LIGHT COMA

INTERVIEWED BY
FAIZ RAZI

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
MR. KING

Light Coma is the Chicago-based trio of Brian Orchard (guitar and vocals), Ryan Rezvani (bass) and Jim MacGregor (drums). They write moody, heartfelt and beautiful songs, and play them ferociously. I had the pleasure of speaking with them at length about their songwriting, their languorous recording process, and their new record, Countermeasures.

Interview by Faiz Razi

Ryan Rezvani: ...I have seen worse things than Tub girl. And when someone mentions Tub girl, I think of those worse things.

Faiz Razi: Nice. Nice.

And that is the perfect way to start this interview. We are sitting here in the house of Brian Orchard, who is a Light Coman, if you will...

Brian Orchard: I thought it was Light Commanist...

FR: You've been recording with Greg Norman at his Studio Greg Studios II. How long have you been doing that? What's the status?

BO: It's been sort of a glacial pace. I think we started in November of 2008. I had a group of songs that I had written and asked Jim and Ryan to work those up with me to go record them. It turned into a continuing thing when we clicked. A lot of the songs [on Countermeasures] are the first ones I had written, but we created a couple of new ones together over time. It's been great, because it's been a slow-moving process. I don't like the term organic, but we haven't been forcing anything and it's progressed nicely. Even though it's been a long period of time, it doesn't necessarily seem arduous.

FR: You guys are all pretty active in other bands and other projects. Brian I know that you play in both Bottomless Pit and .22. Jim, I know that you are an astronaut-for-hire in your many bands [Century Rocket Building, Bully Pulpit, et al.], and Ryan has his male modeling career, which takes up a lot of time...

BO: Ryan plays on a baseball team [Electrons] during the summer. I'm just mentioning that, because he does do something outside of male modeling...

RR: Thanks, Brian.

FR: ... It makes sense that something like this would take a while. How do you keep yourselves on task?

BO: We try to do a once-a-week thing. We'll get together and do some recording ourselves, and that helps us keep songs in mind and keeps them going. As you get older, you have to find a way to be productive in the time that you have.

FR: Is there a particular reason you chose to record with Greg Norman?

BO: I wouldn't say I forced the issue, but there's a familiarity that I have with Greg that's easy. For what you pay, you come out of it with great recordings.

RR: It's a very comfortable situation. There's something about just being in Studio Greg Studios II...

FR: Do you go over there a day at a time, or do you bunker down for the weekend?

BO: It's mostly been a day at a time, but we've done both. Jim MacGregor

The tracking was ganged up together, usually as time allowed. The way we work, there's more of a natural unfurling than a strident momentum, although it's been very useful and very successful.

FR: You guys have only played a handful of shows. What differences are you finding from the recordings to how it's been playing out?

JM: It's certainly more Spartan than anything else. There aren't a lot of overdubs. We have the benefit of playing music that sounds like it's all from the same group, but it's not all the same type of songs. Within that, there's enough character in the songs that lends itself to being held together by the three of us. If anything, we polish or firm up the edges of that in the studio, and make sure the music is being captured appropriately.

FR: In some ways, when I watch you play, it's like watching the bizarro-world .22; there's the smoking drummer who beats the crap out of the kit; there's the swarthy, of-questionable-ethnicity bass player... [laughter]

RR: I'll never tell.

FR: He's like a Turturro or something...

BO: ...Is he Mexican? Is he Iranian? What is he?

RR: That's not a wide enough range...

FR: Brian, considering that you write for both bands, how do you pick the songs you're going to work on with .22 and the songs you're going to work on with Light Coma?

BO: I was thinking about this the other night. There's not really an identifiable difference, necessarily, but there's definitely a feel that's different in my head.

FR: Oh, sure. The two bands don't sound alike aside from your voice in certain spots. The feel of the songs definitely comes across as though there's a different songwriting process.

BO: They key identifiable thing is in a lot of the bass. Ryan's bass lines are a lot more straightforward and that lends itself to the songs themselves being more straightforward.

FR: On that point, it's interesting that you're the constant in both bands, but you can really hear the other people bringing their own personal input and arrangements and melodic sense to the songs.

JM: I think Brian comes in with a fairly sketched-out idea in terms of parts or arrangement. We hammer on it for a while, and everyone is open to ideas. It's pretty natural.

RR: There's a comfortable point between working on songs on our own and sharing these things with each other that more or less balances out.

BO: It's one of those things where you continue to chip away at a song and it ends up at a logical point.

FR: It's like the song feels done.

BO: Yeah, but more importantly, the song gets to the point where you feel you can record it. I remember somebody talking about how songs either fall into place, or songs take x number of months and you play them for a while and they settle somewhere. I think for us, things settle depending on what the song is, but even then, I think we've tried to change things a little bit here and there.

JM: I think all the songs, at this point, are what I would term as 'correct'...

RR + BO: Yes

FR: For those not familiar with Jim's terms, there is 'right' and there is 'correct'.

JM: ...and you can try to lock it down so that everything is good, or you just know after a certain while when it presents itself as a final form, or you can continuously tweak and polish it. Working on these recordings over this period of time has been insightful. We've definitely taken a moment to listen to older versions of songs. After rehearsing more, or playing the songs out more, we've realized that they've gotten better, and we've scrapped some older versions in favor of recording them again.

RR: To take it a step further, all of these songs are painstaking masterpieces...

That's a joke.

FR: No, no. That's good. That's going to print.

RR: I think we're all on the same page.

FR: When you guys are writing together, what's different in that dynamic?

JM: I'll say this: I'm always an audience member for what comes out of Brian's head. I'm always interested and intrigued to hear how a song presents itself. That's something to me that's been important. I'm so happy to be in the position to work with these songs, being a tremendous fan of Brian's other efforts even before we got to this point.

RR: I've been to more .22 shows than any other band

that I've ever seen. I'm definitely a fan, and I've always secretly wanted to be in a band with Brian. Funny thing is, Jim and I were playing together in a different band. We didn't have a singer/guitarist and were wracking our brains about who to ask. Brian called one day and I had mentioned that we were looking for someone, not even considering him. He said he had some songs and asked if we'd like to try them out. I said, "yeah! Yeah! I just need to run that by Jim."

JM: I said "No." [laughter]

BO: You're either part of the ghetto, or you're not part of the ghetto.

RR: Word.

FR: Yeah. Word Life. Hopefully that'll go to print under your picture, Brian.

What was the easiest part of this recording process? What was the most difficult?

JM: I think that there's standard studio stuff where we've got all this crap that we have to move into this other space, and then we have to move it all out. I don't know...it's an embarrassment of riches. It's great to be able to hear it done like we hear it in our heads.

BO: It sounds totally corny, but it's hard to go to this place where this guy goes "OK, I've got everything set up, I'm going to hit this button and you guys make the magic!"

RR: Which is literally what Greg does every session...

JM: ...every take...

RR: ...and he's naked....and he cries...

BO: ...which is weird, but it's hard to...

RR:it's hard to shut it out....

[laughter]

BO: ...it's hard to get that image out of your head...again, it is hard to get to the point where you're not thinking about this stuff...

JM: ...where you're not thinking about playing and just playing.

RR: The bottom line is that it hasn't been that difficult. I mean I don't think of it that way. I didn't even realize it had been over two years. It's part of the process with these gentlemen. We haven't played a lot of shows, and quite frankly, I'm totally fine with that. I'm super happy just to go to practice every weekend.

BO: To be honest, being in a band at this point is a joy, but it's also a malady or a disease. It just becomes part of you, and you've got to feed it a bit. I think that's what this is. We've all figured out how to feed that disease enough.

JM: The chemistry in the room is the driving thing for me.

If we get to take that somewhere else and present it?

Great. If people get to see it? Awesome. If they enjoy it?



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- BRIAN ORCHARD



Wonderful. Aside from that, I'm really just in this for the money and the record deals.

RR: We knew that about you.

BO: I'm going to re-direct over here...my favorite part of the whole thing is that I always find myself enjoying the process of recording, and the moment of listening to all of the mixes of the recording...

FR: You mean as a piece?

BO: Yeah. I think it's good to put things out to people. And as long as a handful of people are interested, I'd keep doing it. Outside of that, I don't necessarily care. I don't even go back and listen to old recordings a lot. I'd rather move on to the next thing. •