**The Helio Sequence**

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Release date: May 18th in Europe and May 19th in North America

The self-titled sixth album by The Helio Sequence began with a friendly competition. Several of the duo’s friends within the Portland, Oregon music scene had been playing “The 20-Song Game.” The rules were simple, playful and ambitious: Songwriters would arriv~~e~~ in their studios at prearranged times and spend all day recording 20 complete songs. When they were finished, they’d have a party, listen to the results and talk about the process—of taking the good with the bad, of letting creativity push past constraint, of simply making music in the moment. Brandon Summers and Benjamin Weikel took the spirit of the “The 20-Song Game” to heart, and forged ahead writing a new record.

“*Negotiations* was a very long, introspective process,” remembers Summers of the band’s 2012 Sub Pop LP. “We shut ourselves off from the world and disappeared down the rabbit hole. That’s how we tend to work, but we wanted to try something new, open and immediate.”

In a sense, The Helio Sequence had spent their whole career preparing for this record. They’d sunk entire recording advances into studio purchases, collaborating with local engineers to build custom gear and a space where they could blend high fidelity with kaleidoscopic sound. In 2013, the pair took on their first full-scale production project, the Brazilian rock band Quarto Negro, after the group inquired about their space and availability through Facebook. As producers, they’d remixed Shabazz Palaces, picked up mixing sessions with Portland acts and earned representation from Global Positioning Services. Summers and Weikel discovered just how adaptable and powerful their studio could be.

In May of 2014, inspired by the “20-Song Game”, they began arriving each morning in their Portland space—housed in the cafeteria and break room of an old warehouse— with the mission of making as much music as possible in one month. They began exploring and capturing, recording guitar riffs and keyboard loops, drum patterns and bass lines. One piece documented, they quickly advanced to the next idea. Summers and Weikel didn’t discuss what they were making or the reference points that informed it, though such discussions had once been central to The Helio Sequence’s more self-conscious process. They just played. Created. In time, they returned to each fragment, broadcasting it over the studio PA, jamming and recording the results. Mistakes didn’t matter, and second chances didn’t exist. After two weeks, Summers and Weikel began cutting those loose takes into rough shapes, steadily building songs from their cavalier sketches.

Although making records can be a laborious and tedious process, Summers delights in the memory of making this one.

“We were coming to the studio on these sunny mornings everyday with an open mind,” Summers shares. “We said, ‘I’m just going to do what feels good in the moment.”

“We worked so quickly that there was a running optimism,” he continues. “There’s this sense of striving for perfection where you can actually take momentum away. But we wanted this record to be momentum in and of itself.”

When June arrived, the duo gathered their 26 finished songs and sent them to 31 friends, fans and family members. They asked each person to rank their 10 favorite tracks. By summer’s end, they had arrived at the brisk 10 tracks that shape the breathless and magnetic *The Helio Sequence*—a record so named because it’s a kind of clean restart for the longtime pair, a revamp of their process and a revitalization of their results.

*The Helio Sequence* is a renewed push forward for the band: From the cool wallop of “Deuces,” where guitars snarl and harmonies soar, to the stuttering anxiety of “Upward Mobility”, where pianos pound and drums race, this collection depends upon an effortless kinetic energy. Lyrically, “Stoic Resemblance” is a study of existential anxiety, but musically, it’s a beguiling burst of pop, Summers’ vocals rising over and sliding off of Weikel’s big, irrepressible beat. The bittersweet “Leave or Be Yours” evokes the easy twinkle of romance and the smoldering sadness of losing it. Crisscrossing vocals and cross-talking guitars and drums map a broad swirl of emotions.

With its easy acoustic jangle, “Inconsequential Ties” might be one of the most surprising, light moments within the bombastic Helio Sequence catalog. But considered within the band’s history, it points to the pop that’s bound Summers and Weikel for so long. Indeed, there’s a delightful candor to *The Helio Sequence*, an openness that is a rare and special feat for a band about to enter its third decade.

“It’s less about curating yourself or trying to put yourself across how you *want* to be perceived,” says Summers. “It’s about having a conversation with people and giving them something that’s who you are.”