

UNDER THE RADAR



MEMORYHOUSE

For Your Eyes and Ears Only

Words by Mike Hilleary

Memoryhouse vocalist Denise Nouvion has two completely different-colored eyes. One is blue, the other a greenish-brown. Easily overlooked at first, at close range they become difficult to ignore. “I had a cataract when I was three, and it was taken out,” says Nouvion, sitting next to her songwriting partner Evan Abeele. “Somehow, during the operation, it messed with something, and my eye changed color over the years. My one pupil’s not even completely round. I can’t even see out of that eye very well. My name was ‘Wolf Eyes’ throughout high school.”

The sensation of something small and subtle one moment becoming intimately transfixing the next can be felt when listening to the Toronto-based duo’s brand of day-glow dream-pop, with its tunes reliant on Abeele’s gauzy guitar work and Nouvion’s empathetic, melancholy vocals.

Nouvion and Abeele, who are 20 and 23, respectively, met roughly three years ago while attending the concert of a local band. Noticing that Nouvion was a photographer taking pictures of the show, Abeele approached her about working together. Their initial collaboration took the form of a multimedia art project in which Abeele’s ambient soundscapes and drone music was paired with Nouvion’s images. This simple ambition turned into something more, however, when the two became isolated and in need of entertainment during a late-night snowstorm.

“I was playing ‘These Days’ by Jackson Browne on an acoustic guitar,” recalls Abeele. “And [Denise] sang. It was the first time she had ever sung, the first time I had ever heard her sing for sure, and it was amazing, and I thought, ‘Oh my god, how have you never sung before?’ I immediately had so many ideas in my head. In the coming months we just started writing music together and she started singing a lot more, and it spawned from that. It was a very spontaneous thing and fell into place really quickly after that.”

The duo, taking its name from a 2001 record by composer Max Richter, has since released a handful of singles and put out a critically lauded EP entitled *The Years*, and they were signed to the Sub Pop roster earlier this year. Maintaining a strong audio/visual dynamic—images and movies are projected during live performances, and Nouvion’s photographs serve as the art for record sleeves—the young pair are looking to begin recording their full-length debut album sometime this summer and are already exploring ways to break beyond the compartmentalized malaise of the dream-pop genre.

“I think we’re growing more and more confident in our sound, and we don’t want to remain this languid, reverb-y type band,” says Abeele. “We really want to take a step up. I think I want to use Emmylou Harris as a kind of sound touchstone, how *Pieces of the Sky* has this very confident, yet graceful, elegant voice at the very first and center. There’s no frills or anything about it. It’s just her voice. That’s what you hear and that’s what you connect with—and I think if Memoryhouse is going to distinguish itself, we have to keep that intimate band connection.”