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- News
- Opinion
- Blogs
- Music
- Arts
- Events
- Eats
- Special Issues
- Multimedia
- Classified
- Promotions
- Archive

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Dreaming is free

School of Seven Bells translate their subconscious into music with help from their quirky singer

By Sammi Skolmoski

Dreaming is free

You'd think Alejandra Deheza would've had all the answers. Once, when her band was traveling through Germany, the GPS in their tour van coaxed them blindly through a series of strange turns up and around the Alps until the road narrowed to the width of the van and they got stuck in the mud. Coincidentally, Deheza, the singer for School of Seven Bells, was re-reading René Daumal's *Mount Analogue* and conducting rigorous, albeit recreational, research on Hermann Buhl, the pioneer of alpine-style mountain climbing (wherein the climber uses little more than grace and the human body to reach the top).

Unfortunately none of this information proved useful to them, because—funny thing—Deheza is absolutely terrified of heights.

"It was just the theme going on in my life at that time," Deheza says. *Mount Analogue* is "this book about this mountain. In the beginning of the book, it may or may not exist, and it's just the story of these people that are trying to find it. But you can't find it if you're trying."

This obscure knowledge may not have helped at the time, but it became useful when it came time to name *School of Seven Bells'* album, *Alpinisms*. Deheza, along with twin sister Claudia (both formerly of *On! Air! Library!*) and guitarist Benjamin Curtis (formerly of *Secret Machines*), may have taken the same approach to writing the songs on the album as those who inadvertently stumbled upon *Mt. Analogue*. In the same way the band got lost in the Alps that day, they've explored their musical panorama without any specific expectations or time limits until the right sound just presented itself to them.

"It depends on who comes up with something," Deheza says. "They kind of start out the song and it's this chain that happens, and it kind of gets passed around until we feel like it's finished. It's like this ongoing conversation."

Deheza continues these conversations into the night, indulging herself in intellectual pursuits even as she sleeps. She's a lucid dreamer, she says, aware that she's dreaming and able to actively participate in the subconscious world. She says that's where she gathers the most meaningful information to fuel her writing. She observes and explores what her psyche presents, and she retains it when she wakes. These experiences are enhanced through the music.

"It adds another dimension," Deheza says. "It adds sound to it in the same way that if you read a book out loud, it's a completely different experience than just reading it in your head."

The dreamy, vocals-driven pop of *Alpinisms*, particularly the standout track "Half Asleep," is the sonic reflection of Deheza's hyperconsciousness. Curtis' simple, ethereal guitar tone provides the perfect complement to the twins' precise, breathy harmonies. At their softest, *School of Seven Bells* are reminiscent of Imogen Heap and Bat for Lashes and at their most poppy, *Little Dragon* and *Cocteau Twins*.

"It's really psychedelic music that you can dance to," Deheza says, quickly adding, "Not like jam-band dance—it's got beats."

If nothing else, the band's music is representative of how complicated the lines between reality, art and the surreal can really be. Deheza encourages everyone, both in music and everyday life, to dabble and play at the borders of consciousness.

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"Start trying to become aware of [when you're in a dream], because you learn a lot once you can realize that you can experiment with them and bring certain situations about," she says. "You can see how you really would react to them. It brings out a fearlessness that pretty much everyone has, and I think people are a lot more fearless than they think they are.

"That's one of the best feelings that you get from it because you realize that there doesn't have to be this drudgery involved with getting up and feeling like you're doing the same thing and looking at the same things again. It's all within your control to make things happen, make things alive for you."

School of Seven Bells play with Phantogram on Sunday, Oct. 4, at The Casbah. www.myspace.com/schoolofsevenbells.

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