

Trés Sheik

Alternative singer/songwriter soothes at The Casbah

By ERIC YATES
THE BEACON

Since releasing his self-titled debut in 1996, Duncan Sheik has always been a man of little fanfare, despite his first single from that album, "Barely Breathing" garnering a Grammy nomination for Best Male Pop Vocal Performance.

Possessing a tapped-straight-from-the-tree-syrupy voice and an immense talent for beautiful composition and songwriting, the 35-year-old South Carolina native played to about 250 "Sheik Freaks" on Sept. 17 at The Casbah.

Sheik was supported at the show by singer/songwriter David Poe. A funny, likeable guy, Poe announced that his set would be "the rock event of the year," ironic because of his acoustic stylings. Poe treated the crowd to six of his own songs, most off of *Love Is Red*, which was released earlier this year, and has been described by one critic as "the makeout album of the year." His gentle, folk-twined voice left many of the female audience members mesmerized, mouths agape and lost in reverie.

Though "Barely Breathing" received much critical and commercial success, Sheik is content with eschewing the mainstream pop scene and focuses on making music that is important to him.

"It was a long process that I've gone through over the past 10 years of getting to a place and saying, the real litmus test, is saying 'Do I like this piece of music, you know, does it move me' and to not kind of second guess what the record company executive would want or even the listener on the radio station," he said in an interview earlier in the week. "It's important to me because otherwise it would be like living a lie to me. It would turn the whole process of recording and playing music into kind of a job as opposed to a really enjoyable, artistic kind of process. Through it all, actually I learned a valuable lesson, which is that I'm just one of those artists who it's never a good idea to try to do things for even remotely commercial reasons, because I'm always disappointed."

Dressed in a minimal black T-shirt which read "I Blame Paris Hilton" on the front and "For Everything" on the back, and

adorned with a full beard, a departure from his earlier, clean shaven look, he delighted those in attendance by offering material off of his upcoming release *White Limousine* (due out in January 2006).

The first song, "Fantastic Toys and Corduroys," off of *Limousine* had a spacey, atmospheric sounding guitar, mixed in with Sheik's layered falsetto voice.

He then continued with more familiar material, asking the audience to "sing heartily and lustily" during "Good Morning," off of 2002's *Daylight*.

After a few more songs from earlier albums — including "Rubbed Out" and the subtly sappy "For You," — Sheik slugged the rest of his cocktail and broke out into his best Ron Burgandy.

"Scotch, scotch, scotch. This is a new spot for me here in San Diego," to which many in the crowd responded with other various quotes from the movie *Anchorman*.

Throughout the evening, his material from *White Limousine* showcased the album's use of experimental electronic sound.

"I have a real love of electronic music and the experimental side of electronic music and I just wanting to kind of do something," Sheik said, regarding the album. "The problem is that there is a side of me that likes electronic music and there's this other side of me that is probably a little bit stronger, which is like a crusty old folk musician (laughs) and as I continued to work on recording these songs, and writing more songs, the organic instrumentation started to take over, like vines taking over a building in a way."

He continued to delight the crowd and received grand ovations for "She Runs Away" and "Mr. Chess," during the encore. Upon hearing the first chord to "Barely Breathing" the crowd hooted and hollered and sang along with every word.

Sheik is very humble, gracious artist, who seemed almost surprised that people were even cheering, when in reality he is a musician of such immense talents, that he has written the score for a Hollywood movie and a musical entitled "Spring Awakening" which will open off-Broadway next year.

He and Poe are also in the process of finishing an album with their as yet unnamed band, which also features drummer Matt Johnson, New York-based singer/songwriter Morgan Taylor and key-

boardist Phil Cronengold. The duo performed "Love's A Sinner," a beautifully harmonized folk ballad, as the last song to Poe's set.

"We're like the downtown New York not-so-supergroup," said Sheik of the band, whose debut release will be out next summer.

Sheik finished off his set with "a little something for all the Radiohead fans," his cover of "Fake Plastic Trees."

All in all, it was what you would expect from a Sheik show. No frills, little fanfare. Just tender, soul-moving music. And for his fans — but more importantly for Sheik himself — that's more than enough. ■



Courtesy photo

Singer/songwriter Duncan Sheik is near completion of his fifth full-length album, *White Limousine*, which will be released in late January.

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