

Music: Swedish Love story

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Minnesota-by-way-of-Sweden band mixes pop-rock with science.

By Andrea Myers



Photo by Darin Back

Love in October, left to right: Kent Widman, Chresten Hyde, Erik Widman, Charlie Abbott.

Love in October frontman Erik Widman isn't the type to settle into a rut. Free-spirited and confident, the 25-year-old is quite comfortable leading a double life: scientist by day, lead singer of a local Swedish pop band by night. "I have a degree in electrical engineering. I'm half-scientist, half-engineer. I make neurostimulators -- who would have thought?" Widman laughs.

On his band's new record, "Pontus, the Devil, and Me," released Tuesday, hints of Widman's scientific alter ego take form in whirs of a whistling melodica and moments of meticulously orchestrated chaos. The disc alternates between straightforward emo pop-song structures and more dynamic musical ideas. It climaxes with a cartoonish instrumental interlude ("An Average Idea") and the up-tempo, catchy "Petrula the Destroyer," which recalls the vaudevillian piano work of the Dresden Dolls.

As a debut full-length album, "Pontus" is the work of a band coming to terms with its sonic identity. "I want to get away from this rock-band concept of just guitars and drums; it's boring after a while," says Widman. He says the addition of instruments such as the melodica, vibraphone and strings have helped him to define the band's sound and pay homage to his roots.

Born in Sweden, Widman grew up playing music with his brother (and Love in October bassist) Kent, amassing an eclectic variety of musical influences. "My mom is from Michigan; my dad is Swedish," he explains. "I've always grown up in this bilingual, multicultural, crazy home, and I've spent my life going back and forth between Michigan and Sweden. I've always been a vagabond." Keeping one foot in each world, Widman explored Swedish folk music and became enthralled by early-'90s Swedish indie rock in addition to American pop acts such as Michael Jackson and the Foo Fighters.

Widman and his brother moved to Minnesota in 2006 to focus on their music and have since established themselves as a force in the power-pop world. "Pontus" and last year's EP "Words of Sound" were recorded at Black Lodge in Kansas with producer Ed Rose (Motion City Soundtrack, Get Up Kids), and Love in October was recently selected as a Band of the Day on Spin.com. Widman has just returned from Los Angeles, where he was filming a music video, but he seemed unfazed by the demands of his part-time rock 'n' roll lifestyle.

Despite his success with Love in October, Widman says he hopes to start new projects and adventures in the near future. "I want to go into filmmaking, eventually," he says with a self-assured smirk. "I'd like to do that for a while, and I'd probably want to go back to school after that." Judging by the way he throws himself into his endeavors, it's safe to say there is a bright future ahead for this ambitious Swedish-American vagabond.

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