



## Raw Power

This Is a Shakedown mixes punk energy and electronics-driven rock

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by Anastasia\_Pantsios

This Is a Shakedown is chomping at the bit to get out and show the world what they can do.



You can sense it as the four members of the Cleveland-based band gather in the showcase room at Ante Up Audio, the studio where they recorded

their debut album *Love Kills*. Their gear and full light show are set up on the full-sized stage, and they've been running through the show they'll do for the CD release party this weekend — and hopefully many more nights to come.

Singer-guitarist Brandon Zano, bassist Daniel Lee, drummer Stephen Nicholson and keyboard player/programmer Justin Nyilas came together only last year, but they've come a long way. They had a head start as experienced veterans of area bands like Tender Blind Spot, Leo and a Dozen Red Roses. And they came to Shakedown with a clear sense of what they wanted to do — break away from the punk and metal sounds they'd been playing, but keep that energy and

apply it to raucous, electronics-driven dance-rock.

Zano, Lee and Nicholson had worked together in a Dozen Dead Roses. When that band fizzled, Zano asked the other two to work with him on solo material. But as they began revamping Zano's material, a collective vision emerged. And when Nyilas joined, things came together quickly.

Zano approached Ante Up owner Michael Seifert, whom he'd worked with on a previous project, about recording some of the tunes. Seifert was so impressed he offered to produce their record. He also made *Love Kills* the first release on the record company he's launched, Reversed Image.

"The label took a big chance with this band," says Zano. "We're not your run-of-the-mill rock band. We're a very European-sounding band. Most of the people we're influenced by are from overseas — Bloc Party, lots of DJs like Justice, Bloody Beetroots."

Seifert and the band went into the studio earlier this year to record *Love Kills*, then brought in Sean Beaven (Nine Inch Nails, Marilyn Manson) to mix the album, which is available on beautifully packaged vinyl as well as CD.

"Michael gets what we're doing," says Nyilas. "He's in the forefront of our recording." "He brought an outside perspective to the record," adds Zano. "We wrote the songs how we thought they would sound good. He came in and made everything sound like it should sound."

"He trusted us as far as arrangements go," says Lee. "Ninety percent of it was how we arranged it. On other records, the producer arranges everything. It's validating to us as musicians and arrangers. It's a very flourishing and functional relationship."

They say Beaven's contribution was critical too. "[The mix] determines a lot of the direction of the album and changes how you categorize it," says Lee.

Listeners will likely categorize the resulting hybrid as infectious but relentless. *Love Kills* is a muscular record filled with exuberant songs like "The Beat," "Oh!" and "You Make Me Wanna" that crackle with overlapping layers of sound. There's even a take on the Rodgers and Hart standard "My Funny Valentine," which honors the underlying melody while giving it a jolt of adrenalin.

With the record done, the band's focus now is on refining its live show and hopefully getting out on the road soon.

"We want people when they see us to go 'We loved the record, but fuck, they're better live,'" says Zano. "We're from Cleveland, which is a heavy music scene, so there is a sort of raw punkness to how we play. There's that sense of not knowing what's going to happen the next second. As a local band, we want to set the bar higher than anyone has achieved. We want it to be an experience. We want people to walk out of our show and go, 'What was *that?*'"

He says it's a lot of work. "If we put out a product that sounds amazing and looks amazing, it's a challenge to be able to put that across live. When you have a CD that's like a wall of sound with so many things going on,

it's hard to be able to sonically match that live."

So the band has been feverishly reconfiguring songs that had as many as 100 tracks on the album, which used four drum kits miked simultaneously. They've been working with two lighting people to design and program an elaborate light show to help make their sets a multi-sensual experience. But they're still leaving room for spontaneity in their sets.

"Our hope is that people will get what we're doing," says Zano. "When we started the band, we had a list of what we wanted to do. Most of the stuff on the list has happened — the light rig, who we played with, certain shows we did. We nailed them within a year. Our hope is when people see us play, they know how much work went into it."

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