

different plans and The Secret Handshake

by Matt Stern

LUIS DUBUC EXPLAINS WHAT HE'S REALLY DRIVING AT

driving a car with one of its rearview mirrors held on by duct tape, Luis Dubuc, the creative force behind The Secret Handshake, is heading home to Dallas. Heading down the road in the middle of nowhere, Illinois, he is still quite excited about the one-off show that he's just played, the one that found him trekking out to the extremely affluent Chicago suburb of Barrington. What unique kind of performance opportunity found The Secret Handshake embarking on a cross country road trip? An 8th grade graduation party.

"It was all thirteen year old kids," says the 22-year-old Luis, "It was awesome. It was really awesome. They lived on this ranch thing. I don't know. There [were] horses...it was awesome."

Given his willingness to play a middle school graduation gig, not to mention his enduring post-show enthusiasm, it's quite clear that Luis has no qualms about the audience to which The Secret Handshake's EP, entitled *The Summer of '98*, primarily appeals.

"It's fine," continues Luis, discussing *The Summer of '98*'s ultra-safe aesthetic and the fan base it has attracted. "It's like, I'm down with that, but it's not who I'm trying to be. It's not like I sit around and write a song and say, 'well, this one's gonna be for this demographic.' It's not some sort of evil plan or anything. That song definitely appeals to that age group, and it's fine."

The EP features three slices of bubbly, post-Postal Service indietronic schmaltz mixed up with a hint of glitch, and three accompanying remixes. Fluffy and radio-ready, it sounds like it should come free with any purchase at Hot Topic. But Luis isn't content to have The Secret Handshake understood as vapid mall-rock, despite the EP's tween-friendly sheen. He insists that the rest of the full length record from which the EP was culled will paint a very different picture of the music he's interested in making.

"The songs on the [upcoming full length], they sound a little more grimy," says Luis. "There's a couple R&B jams on it... I think it's a different record than I think anyone's anticipating. A lot of people will hear the song "Summer of '98" and write it off as a Hellogoodbye thing, and it's really not that."

The Secret Handshake has, in fact, toured with that particular Drive-Thru Records act, though Luis points out that while big bands get a bus on tour, at this point he's still carting his cohorts around in a beater. Out on the road, he's usually accompanied by his girlfriend, who doubles as his merch girl, and a drummer named Beardo, famous among friends both for his impressive beard (match) and the infrequency with which he does his laundry.

Sans the Bearded One this go-round, and with at least twenty four hours left until Dallas, Luis explains the genesis of his interest in electronic music. Briefly a fan of drum-n-bass, seeing DJs spin didn't strike him as an invitation to create. It was a performance by The Postal Service and subsequent introduction to the work of indietronic maven DNTEL (aka James Tamborello) that opened him up to making music with synths and laptops. Though his affinity for keyboards wasn't exactly born from a familiarity with the classic electro-pop canon, in the past few years, he's sought to explore all things electronic.

A professed fan of experimental electronic music, IDM, and the style of rock-influenced house style that's so recently come into vogue with French DJs Justice, his influences extend beyond what showed up on the single. He continues to describe the upcoming full length—and the tracks he's recently demoed—as decidedly different from his big audience-courting single.

"It sounds silly for me to say that it sounds more mature, but it sounds a lot older. It's very R&B sounding, with a lot of horns. Like, a little Motown," says Luis. That might sound weird for me to describe that if you've only heard the *Summer of '98* EP, but I think if you hear the record that comes out this summer, you'll be like, "I get it."

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