



Michael Benjamin Lerner is Telekinesis. PHOTO BY RACHEL DEMY

The lonely pop singer

The all-encompassing creative process behind Telekinesis

It's fairly common these days for rock bands to be fronts for individual music creators who mostly go it alone in the studio and recruit

a rotating cast of friends for tours (see: Tame Impala). In this manner, Seattle-based indie-pop band Telekinesis is the brainchild of Michael Benjamin Lerner, a drummer and songwriter who produced, recorded and mixed the outfit's fifth album, *Effluxion*.

by
Howard
Hardee

Preview:
Telekinesis performs
Wednesday, May 1,
8 p.m. Sontalk opens.
Tickets: \$13

**Sierra Nevada
Big Room**
1075 E. 20th St.
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"It's not the path I would have chosen, really," he said of being the band's only architect. "I wanted to be a drummer in a band, and I did that a bunch in my early 20s and got kind of burned out. I started writing songs mostly for myself, my friends and my family, and then, for whatever reason, someone heard it and that became my job. If I could wave a magic wand, I'd definitely be in a band-band."

There are pros and cons to writing and recording all of the parts himself, Lerner said. For one, it can

feel like he's creating in a vacuum, without anyone to tell him "whether something's good or bad, or whether I should go eat some food and drink some water," he said. "At the same time, it's really great to have an idea and put it down without any extraneous stuff, so you can do it as quickly as possible. I'm lucky enough to have a recording spot in my house so I can go do that whenever I want to."

Telekinesis is playing—with a full band—at the Sierra Nevada Big Room next Wednesday (May 1), in support of *Effluxion*. As is his penchant, Lerner has created a collection of highly textured power-pop songs that sound instantly familiar in the best way. Which is to say that Lerner's music is both original and infectious; if you like indie-rock artists like The Shins and Death Cab for Cutie, you're already on board for Telekinesis. (In fact, Telekinesis' 2008 debut record was produced, mixed and engineered with the help of Chris Walla, formerly of Death Cab. Walla also played instruments on the album.)

Effluxion represents something of a return to form for Lerner, who dabbled with synthesizers and drum machines on his last album, *Ad Infinitum* (2015). His latest

work features the sort of slow-building, guitar-based rockers ("Set a Course") and bright and poppy strolls in the park ("How Do I Get Rid of Sunlight?") that placed Telekinesis so firmly in the indie-rock genre in the first place. The songs sound rich and full, which is impressive when you think about Lerner working alone, learning just enough as he goes to execute his ideas—extending to the process of producing his own music, during which he belabors thousands of small decisions.

"It's not ideal," he said. "When I started doing this 10 years ago, the amount of money a record label would give you up front to make an album was significantly more than it is now, because there's not a lot of revenue being generated by the sales of media. It was great, because I could work with a producer and that would fit into the budget for the record. Now, it's difficult to spend that money. It's kind of a drag, because ultimately I think it's a more fulfilling way to work."

It turns out that, for Lerner, having a practice and studio space at home is a mixed blessing. "When you're working on your own, you can take all time you want," he said. "And that's not a good thing for me."



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