



Bentbleu features (from left) Troy Casa, Keaton Casa and Angelese Pepper. That's singer Kelly Jarvis, live via Chicago, on the phone in Keaton's hand.

PHOTO/MARK EARNEST

# Shoegaze dreams

Bentbleu

**They say long distance musical relationships are doomed to failure, but there are several examples of bands that still make that arrangement work.** (Doom-metallers Pallbearer and rock icons Pearl Jam spring to mind.)

Acoustic rock band Bentbleu is in the same boat. Reno members Troy Casa (guitar), his son Keaton Casa (drums) and Angelese Pepper (cello) have a lead vocalist, Kelly Jarvis, who lives several time zones away in Chicago.

"There's something about the songs that he sends me that just captivates me and captures my curiosity," said Jarvis, a biotech medical researcher at Northwestern University. "I find myself just compelled to take a walk and figure out the right melody. It's just a natural process to me."

The band's distinct sound evokes the great '80s and '90s UK shoegaze movement of bands like Lush and Slowdive with the more melodic end of that modern-rock style from the Sundays and the Cranberries.

Keaton plays his minimalist drum kit with brushes, but his rhythms still have plenty of drive. Pepper's work is remarkable, as she writes great counter-melodies to bounce off what Casa and Jarvis are doing.

One song with the appropriate working title of "Shoegaze Dream" indeed sounds like those great late '80s UK bands, but with almost no effects.

"We found a way to mimic the shoegaze sound with our strumming patterns and what Angelese is playing with me on the cello," Troy said. "We created that blend without having to stomp on 38 pedals all at once."

The roots of Bentbleu's blend stretch back to Ohio State in 1996, when Troy met Jarvis, and they played in a band together called Cali Swain. Troy moved to Reno in 1999 and continued to play classical style guitar gigs and did some instruction at Mountain Music Parlor. But he got both the material and the itch to start up a band again last year.

"The original idea was to once again have a guitar and a cello to make it all pretty, but then, all of a sudden, I decided I wanted a vocalist again," he said. "We must have auditioned 10 people."

Jarvis and Troy were still friends, and she said yes to the chance to write and record music again.

"I was actually pretty excited about the plan," Jarvis said. "There's been a lot more flexibility as far as the vocals and the recording and doing things when they feel comfortable and good. It allows me to take my time to record the vocals and really make sure that I'm getting everything I want out of it."

Keaton was keen on being the drummer, having played with local band Erin Drive. Troy then found Pepper through the University of Nevada, Reno, website. She's in the master's program for music at the University of Nevada, Reno. It's Pepper's first time playing cello in a rock context.

"It's been really eye-opening for me," she said. "I get to use my musicality in a way that's not like Western classical music, which is what I grew up with and what I'm being trained in. They've really let me be free with myself."

With the lineup in place, Bentbleu has been recording in the makeshift studio that the Casas built in their home, with Keaton as engineer. They hope to put an album out at some point this summer.

Bentbleu will play on May 3 at Dead Ringer Analog Bar, 432 E. Fourth St., and on May 4 at Pignic Pub and Patio, 235 Flint St. Learn more about the band at bentbleu.com.

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