

BIOGRAPHY

There's something to be said for persistence and the ability to create a sound that cites specific influences while still retaining an exuberance and energy of its own.

Wallace Dietz knows something about both. Well, maybe more than a little something considering he's been tirelessly making music under the guise of the somewhat ironically dubbed The Silent Boys as well as various other offshoots for more than three decades.

Today's music landscape brims with young hipster bands that ransacked their parents' record collections and concocted a sound that harkens back to the '80s guitar pop scene when The Cure, New Order, REM, and The Smiths ruled the college radio airwaves. The Silent Boys have their roots in that vein and are still mining this magically melodic era. They recorded and played the local club circuit in Richmond, Virginia from the mid-'80s until 1991, when the group all but disbanded.

After an eight-year hiatus and the release of several Silent Boys songs on various indie record labels, Dietz reformed The Silent Boys in 1999. Since then he has continued to write songs to pay homage to the iconic ensembles of that musically potent decade with a sound, as one writer noted, comprised of "Ultra-melodic lead guitar, strumming acoustic, snappy drums, and expressive bass-lines (that) propel finely crafted pop songs, brimming with lyrical optimism."

As another critic succinctly put it, "The Silent Boys are on a mission to keep the spirit of the 1980's alive."

Now with seven albums under their belt, The Silent Boys, still flying under the radar, are poised for their forthcoming 2020 release titled *Tilt-A-Whirl*.

Although most have defined Dietz's song writing as indie pop, alternative pop, and jangle pop, his output is, in fact, far more than that. Dietz has released two albums under the nom-de-plume, The Shattered Hopes, a vehicle for an unruly and high energy batch of tongue-in-cheek punk-folk-garage songs that didn't quite fit the romantic sweeping imagery of The Silent Boys.

Dietz also recently joined forces with ex-Silent Boys Bruce Smith to form The Steam Train Hearts. Dietz's songwriting for this project still taps into the '80s but with a more rocking electric Neil Young, Dinosaur Jr, Psychedelic Furs feel. Their debut album, *Smoke & Cinder*, is set for release in spring 2020. Dietz's determination and desire seem to know no bounds.

It doesn't even end there. Dietz also plays an active role in two other outfits—Unknown Pleasures, a Joy Division tribute band, and The Grain Hoppers (named for his preferred car to ride during his train hopping years), an alt-country/folk rock band that is being primed for future live shows.

Given his unyielding ambitions, Dietz clearly sets his sights higher. "I'm always trying to write the perfect pop song that uses the most memorable melodies that I can imagine," he says. "I'm inspired by such timeless classics as 'Cinnamon Girl,' 'Space Age Love Song,' 'This Charming

Man,' 'Love Will Tear Us Apart,' 'Driver 8,' 'Boys Don't Cry,' among the many. They are songs by groups that all emphasize joyful melodies, intriguing lyrics, emotional vocals, and passionate playing."

Yet with all these decidedly diverse influences, Dietz says he owes his greatest debt to one artist in particular: Neil Young.

"Trying to learn his songs on my 'el cheapo' department store acoustic guitar during my first year of college kept me engaged with playing despite a useless pinky on my chording hand. Neil Young uses many basic open chords, so whenever I could recreate a part of one of his tunes I was ecstatic. I've always acknowledged him as my most profound inspiration."

Immersed in a steady diet of Neil Young tunes, Dietz then bought and spun the first Feelies album, *Crazy Rhythms*, in the summer of 1981. He was immediately hooked by the frantic strumming and the quirky new wave/post-punk sensibility.

"It made me think that despite my limitations as a guitarist, I could write songs and even play in a band!" he recalled later.

Devoting himself to creating that same rush of excitement that he had experienced, Dietz put together The Silent Boys and became a constant part of the Richmond alternative music scene, opening for bands such as Dumptruck and Love Tractor in the mid to late '80s.

The passion that gave him purpose all those years ago remains with him today. Although the line-up has shifted over the years, The Silent Boys (currently consisting of Dietz on rhythm guitar and vocals, longtime lead guitarist John Suchocki, drummer John Morand, and bassist Michael Click) retain the exuberance that's driven the band over the course of its collective career. It's a sound that's inspired many a pundit to sing their praises, as expressed in various reviews written about their earlier albums:

"Bright, upbeat jangly pop with intelligent lyrics, evoking that warm nostalgic feeling of hearing for the first time in one's life The Smiths, The Go-Betweens, The Brilliant Corners, and The Chills." IndefinitelyBlue.com

"There's something real and pure in the longing of jangly guitars, something warm and friendly in the la-la-la's, something that you didn't know was missing in music like this." DJ Gary Dickerson, KOOP-Austin, Texas

The lyrical optimism of Silent Boys' songs has not gone unnoticed by many a reviewer. Dietz shares the origin of his positivity:

"I was a high school guidance counselor for 31 years, and during that time I never stopped learning—and improving—my understanding of the psychology of relationships," he reflects. "My experiences with students and their families often inform my songwriting and inspire an optimism that comes from helping others overcome challenges."

Here again, Dietz knows of what he speaks. He's been married to his wife—who has designed many of The Silent Boys' album covers—for 33 years and is the father of two children. It's little wonder as well that in addition to his music activities, he's the author of two children's books, *Property of the North Pole* and *Santa's Angels*. He's also the co-founder of heARTcorerva.org, a nonprofit that raises money to fund the ongoing efforts of local public school art and music teachers. The proceeds are raised from activities and special events taking place at Sound of Music recording studio where Dietz has been an active partner for the past three years.

As for the future, Dietz is—naturally—looking forward to his next efforts. According to him, *Tilt-A-Whirl* will have a different vibe from earlier Silent Boys albums:

“*Tilt-A-Whirl* will still retain a vintage sound, but the listener will detect some new and different influences. And while it may be the most mature album we've ever done, I'm not ready to concede my immaturity just yet!”