



interview by Elizabeth Rhodes  
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# 8mm

**8mm's dark electronic sound is helmed by married duo Sean and Juliette Beavan. Ardent music fans are familiar with Sean's production work with bands such as Nine Inch Nails, Guns N' Roses, Marilyn Manson, Slayer, and more. Along with their longtime collaborator Jonny Radtke, 8mm sat down with us to talk about their new EP *Heart-Shaped Hell*, how this project was started, and the importance of storytelling in music.**

**How did 8mm get started?**

Sean Beavan : It actually started with all three of us, I was producing Jonny's debut record Kill Hannah's *For Never & Ever* (2003), and it was the last day of production and A&R came in and was like, "We need female vocals on the two singles," and I mean it was the last day of production so we were getting ready to send it to be mixed. I was going through my Rolodex, calling female singers, no one was available and it was at the same time Juliette walked in to go to lunch and I was like, "Uh, come here for a minute." I took her into the studio and put her in front of the Neumann microphone and said, "Try doing this." We'd been married for seven years but I'd never heard her sing. So we go in and the engineer presses record and she starts singing and we both went, "Whoa!" I was like, "We gotta start writing music together."

Jonny Radtke : It might be a year later [8mm] had done their first record, or you sent me the first EP and, yes, I was just blown away. Juliette sounds so amazing, she sounded so great on our stuff but this stuff I was like, "Oh my God this is the band I want to be in." It was so great.

**How was it for you walking into the room and having that moment?**

Juliette Beavan : It was funny because I actually went into the lounge to the band and told them, "Okay, if this sucks, you know, too bad, you're fucked." [everyone laughs] I went in and Sean sang the part to me and I said, "Okay," and I put the headphones on, sang it back, and thought, "Oh God, have I just fallen in love with something completely stupid?" It was really fun and I did fall in love with it and hoped they didn't come back on and go, "Oh, never mind." But they said, "That was great, want to keep going?" And I was like, "Yeah, I do!"

SB : We ended up doing five songs... We've become such friends, too. It was such a tight knit group, it was kind of nice because they sit in the lounge playing Halo with my daughter who was eleven years old or ten years old then, it was just such a family thing.

**So it was really serendipity.**

JB : Really! It was that night we were at home and he asked, "Do you want to try writing together?" And it was like, "Yeah, if it sucks we can stop." Because we have such a good relationship, it's like a storied relationship and the thing is, if this sucks and we start fighting we can stop. I don't want to start hating you. We were at the first song and we're like, "Oh that's really fun."

SB : I mean literally in the first song she sang it and got to the bridge and I started crying, it just hit me emotionally, so strong.

**How would you describe the scope and intention of 8mm?**

SB : I think both of us had been watching film and television and me as a producer working with major labels and stuff, at the time things were becoming very cookie cutter, very "well the formula is this". We decided that we want to do music that we thought would be great in a montage for a TV show. The kind of thing that hits you emotionally...

JB : We were seeing really interesting and cool music being placed in film and television. I think it was around that time Nick Drake was in the Volkswagen commercial, do you remember? It just stopped you in your tracks and that was where

you were seeing the kind of music that makes you feel and think.

SB : It's that thing where we're missing what's great about music, so we decided to do stuff that was in a similar vein as stuff that we loved from a few years ago, combining that with stuff that was going on, with things we were hearing from TV like Portishead and Massive Attack. What we loved is that quiet and the way Juliette's voice has vulnerability to it. It was the perfect foil to that and plus we were huge David Lynch fans, we kind of threw in a little bit of that vibe. That's why we called the band 8mm, because it brought into mind clandestine back rooms, cigar smoking deals...

JB : Also memories and early porn, all of it kind of hidden. Those little flickers in the back of your mind, whether they're sweet, bittersweet, a taboo... something you kind of hide but need to peek at.

SB : And you can't look away.

**There is such a visual component to the music.**

SB : It was very informed by the visual aspect because I think that was one of the things we were being so inspired by. What we were seeing on really good music placements and stuff, plus probably the post-MTV era.

JB : It was even the way we wrote the first EP and up until recently, Sean would put down a track and I would drive around with it in the car until I saw the story, saw the visual and knew who it was about. It was always an amalgam of different people or made up people or parts of people I know, but there's always a visual in my head to it, there's always a scene to it, and then I go back and say, "I think it's this."

SB : Because she's not a confessional writer, she's more like a Bruce Springsteen. Its stories. She's a screenwriter and it's like every song's a screenplay and that's the idea.

**Tell us about the New Orleans connection to this band.**

JB : I'm born in, north of New Orleans. You can't take the bayou out of the girl.  
 SB : That's where we met. I moved to New Orleans with Nine Inch Nails because we were building a studio there.

**The funeral home studio?**

SB : I found the funeral home and built the studio. Oh man, tearing the walls down was... but yeah, the place was shut down nine years earlier for improper disposal of bodily fluids.

JR : Trent [Reznor] was like, "Yup, let's go for it!"

SB : It's the same thing that happened when he went to LA looking for places to build a studio to record *Downward Spiral* (1994). We get the papers and stuff to sign and they do the disclosure of "A murder happened in this house and it was the Sharon Tate murders," and we were like, "Yes!" But I moved to New Orleans and right before we were going to end up at CMJ with a bunch of bands on our Nothing label we were playing the show at Jimmy's which is this small club around Carrollton [Avenue]. It was going to be super packed. I was mixing front of house for the show, so I just happened to turn around and I saw this girl at the bar. We saw each other and we spent the entire night trying to get together but there were so many people, every time we would come close to each other a swarm of people would block us, so at the end of the night she's standing in the door and I'm packing up, and I look at her, and she looks at me, and she goes... and I go... and she walks out the door and that's it.

JB : Not a word.

SB : Not a word. Two days later which is the day before we leave for New York for CMJ, my friends come over, the guys on the crew and they were like, come on, let's go out, we're going to go to the [French] Quarter. So we end up at Molly Malone's and I'm looking out the door and I see her walk by. I just grabbed my beer and ran! I started talking to her and then I said, "Hey we're thinking about going," and I thought, where's the farthest away bar that we could walk to, and I said, "We're thinking about going to The R Bar," and she's like, "Yeah I'll go," and then we talked every day since. It was September 2nd, 1996.

JB : He knows all the dates.



**Has living in two different cities impacted how you approach music? Is there a difference in the creative output you've had in New Orleans versus Los Angeles?**

SB : I think it's really similar for all of us because the world of music has changed so much and you're able to do so much stuff on your own, get a computer and some stuff and then you're off. When you're in Los Angeles it's a big town but if you're not intimidated it becomes a very small town of a lot of really cool creative people and you find family really soon so they just become part of this creative aspect. It's like when we were starting to work on this record, I got through doing all this synth stuff and the guitar parts and I'm just like, "I'm kinda too tired to do the guitar parts and it really needs strings and I don't know if I have the... Jonny, I'll call Jonny, Jonny would kill this." I sent files over to him and he just, boom boom boom.

JB : [Jonny's been] guesting with us for a while.

JR : Like four or five years.

SB : Yeah, so whenever we've done incarnations of the band where there's another guitar player or whatever we always go for Jonny because we've been family for so long and the stuff he plays fits perfectly in the vibe. Everything that's ever come out of his guitar has always been this big cinema landscape to my ears.

JR : We really understand each other and we have for so many years. [For] my old project Sean was our first choice to get and before I even met Sean Beavan I was a huge fan. When they first sent me the stuff they had been working on as 8mm I immediately was like "I feel I belong here", I knew exactly what they're referencing and all that.

**Do you play differently for 8mm than you do with other projects?**

JR : I have my own style and I bring what I bring which makes me unique in any project I'm in. The stuff that I do for Filter wouldn't make sense with 8mm, there's a different vibe to it. This is something where it's dark and moody to me, really beautiful, cinematic, so when they sent me a couple of these tracks I immediately

knew. I was like, "Oh man, I want to do some Martin Gore shit." Where it's like you're not overtaking the song, you're just adding little layers and extra atmosphere. That's what I love about this band.

SB : Yeah, and it's the great thing about Jonny and his playing, he always finds that perfect part that you didn't know you needed. When you play it, it's like you can't even hear the song without it and that's the great aspect of it. It becomes more than just having a guy play a part, it's like an immediate part of the song.

JR : I understand these guys. I don't need to overplay on something. It's more ethereal and about the atmosphere.

**There's a theme to everything you've talked about: relationships.**

SB : Because one of the things is, we have maybe three distinct families here, people that really are like your family. They're all creative.

JB : Yeah and I think something that's maybe not unique but special about Los Angeles in particular and why I love LA, unabashedly so, [is because] we're able to make these connections and form so many webs and different little hubs of families that intersect and cross in all different ways.

SB : That's lesson number one.

JB : It's unique in that there are literally millions of people here that are doing the same thing, that came here with the same sort of energy and drive, and it's just a matter of seeing that these are tendrils in a web that can help you rise creatively. In order to make relationships it's gotta be "What are you up to?" and, "Wait a minute, I know..." and sometimes connecting people when you have nothing to do with it because I know the guy, I know the girl, I know who can make this happen.

SB : We do that all the time. We connect people.

JB : It becomes about making things, even if your hands aren't all over it, it's about finding families and relationships and networks of people that help you fulfill the gratification that something was created.

SB : We definitely tend to gravitate toward people that love the process, too. It's not just about having a CD made or having a film made, it's the process of doing

it. Because when you're done with one you start doing something else, because the process is what's fun. I love making records. I like the hard work of it. I like exploring films because it's like the pressure of the director calling and saying, "Oh you know you had a month, now you got two weeks [to meet a deadline]."

JR : I'm a session player as well, so I meet a lot of other producers that have never really worked with other players, and some you gel with, some you don't, and it's purely, "I'm just here to do this, it's not a creative environment, it's just whatever." So when you find the people that you really just understand and get, especially here [in Los Angeles] you tend to gravitate toward people and cherish those relationships.

**How did you go about making music licensing something 8mm is known for?**

SB : We're calculating people and I'm a producer so when I'm working with a band, I have to also think of "how is this going to satisfy the record label?" If the band and the record label want to go to radio, what format is this going to fit? I'm cognizant of that stuff. Just like when I mix a record for a band I know what genre it is and then what are the best bands of that genre, what are the best sounds, and I have to create in that genre as well. We did the same thing for TV. The way [Juliette] writes lyrics, it could be the montage scene for [an episode of] Grey's Anatomy because it's the universal telling-the-story in a very personal way. There's so much more freedom in the arrangement around a great lyric that really hits a poignant moment. You have way more leeway when you're working for film and TV because the music suits. [Television and film] fans, they allow themselves to not be tied into a genre. They just know when they hear something right. We got super lucky when we did our first full-length album and we used a friend of ours who was starting a record label and we did the deal together while he was at CMJ in New York.

**What production(s) were you most proud to have your music be part of?**

SB : I personally loved "Around The Sun" on [television show] *Last Girl*.





JB : Yeah, there were girls making out to one of our songs, it was a girl on girl sex scene, it was a good one for him. [everyone laughs]

SB : Yeah that's probably the best one.

JB : The one that always jumps to mind is [a show] called *Kings*. It had Ian McShane as the lead and it was a fantastic cast. If you look this show up and find the season, it's beautifully done. They use "Give It Up" in a scene with the prince. It was so heartbreaking and poignant. It was just so beautifully done, we sat there we were like, "that's gorgeous!"

JR : I remember texting both of you about [8mm song "Nobody Does it Better" used in the film] *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*. I was like, "Did I just hear that? Dude, that's insane."

**How does fashion and aesthetics play a role in your creativity?**

SB : It's funny: there are some bands and some people that just don't have any clue about style and what they want so they hire stylists who do amazing jobs for them. Juliette, Jonny and I have always been people that have a definite sense of, "That sucks. I don't want to do that."

JR : I think with any project it's always the fashion, the way that you're perceived that's very important and it goes along with the music. That was always something coming from Kill Hannah. We were very aware of what everyone was wearing at all times.

SB : And that was one of the things that attracted me to [work with] them.

JR : And that was just who we were, but it wasn't like us playing dress-up, that's how we dressed. We slept in that shit, like we woke up and looked like that. As the years went on our fashion changed with the music just as the music evolved so did we. I feel it's very important that there is an identity, your identity. I feel like these guys always had it covered and it's just a no-brainer, it's not even an issue.

**Is there a temptation with your aesthetics to fall into a genre, to speak to a certain listenership or demographic or have you felt affiliated with a certain subculture?**

JB : I think we're probably similar in this. With all the artwork for each album and each release that we do, there's a clear vision of everything we want to do and a clear look. Performance-wise, aesthetics-wise, it's an amalgam of what I like at the moment. So the constant is our taste filter. I've never thought about it as, "Oh we need to hit Taylor Swift fans so we'll look like this," it's not that. It's like, "I think this is cool right now," so it's changed from the last time we've done photos and press and everything like that.

SB : We're always trying to please ourselves. It's like when I play golf, I'm not playing against the guys that I'm playing with, I'm playing against myself. You try to make yourself happy.

JB : You can find a singular artist and say, "Look, I've got this crazy idea of this kind of cyber-witch look that's kind of an android but kind of Earth Mother." Of course how it all comes back to how it correlates with the music, like with 8mm records I can look at every single album and listen to the songs and be like, "That's the band, that's me." Like when *Opener* came out and you're listening to those songs they're so moody and so dark, we see the photos and we're like, "That's who I would picture writing and singing those songs."

**How would you describe the experience of your live performances?**

JB : Surprisingly explosive. I think that we're very energetic live. I don't know if it's what you would expect but I think that all three of us are performers and the exchange between being on stage and the audience, that energy exchange... So you could expect a lot of sparkle [laughs] and a little bit more explosive energy than you think. We've broken a guitar or two, it's a primal kind of experience in a lot of ways.

SB : Even though in this incarnation the music's so electronic and moody and technical, the top line is always organic. What we've done is broken it down to this technological mood and ambience and then we can explode within it; the human comes out. That's the vibe, the idea.

JB : It's an emotional bloodletting, so we kind of let the pressure off, you can cathartically experience that with us.

**And you're telling these stories in the moment, the stories of the songs you're playing live?**

SB : Oh yeah, for sure. [Juliette is] an actress, so she's definitely in character. It's funny, as a singer she's one of the few I know that when she walks into the booth and looks at the mic, she drops into character immediately. She's one of the most present singers I've ever known. I've worked with some pretty amazing singers but usually it takes two or three takes to get into the vibe, into the emotion of it. And she drops right away. It's kind of like David Bowie where he didn't even get in front of the microphone until he was in the character.

JB : It's about the story, because regardless of what discipline you're in, it's always about the story. That's the primal communication, that's why we listen to music and that's what we go to museums for, that's what we do because we want to feel something in common and so to tell a story properly, you have to be honest. And to be honest, you have to be it. Not a method thing but let go and step in it and go. Words and all.

**What challenges do musicians face in today's music business? How have you navigated these challenges?**

SB : Especially the way this record came about, it's been very free-flowing because we take a long time between records but we're not an insular band. We're all doing project after project after project, we work with other artists, and that's part of the fun. You've got creative juices flowing and you've been doing stuff but it informs where you're going to go next. For this record our licensing agent was really getting on us about [putting out a new release]. We literally didn't have a song written or anything, we just sat down and said let's write it like we write soundtracks. We literally did a spotting session with the director and then just start at bar one and start writing. And that's how it all came about. I finished the first song, I got to the point where we'd written the melody and it really needed a guitar part, [so I] sent it to Jonny. Jonny starts working on that while we start working on the next song. On almost every record I've ever worked, the best songs are the ones that you start writing in the studio and they come fast because all you're thinking about is what works and not that I've been doing this for a month and this is the way it is. It allows you to try something else. So this record lent itself [to working] in a way that we've never done before and all the obstacles went away, even the obstacle of most of our records before I did everything. But having a trusted comrade that I could toss this off to and get stuff from them that inspires me and inspires us, it just made it move so quickly and so easily. So this record has been a real joy.

**What's next for 8mm?**

SB : We're playing The Greek [Theatre], that's our goal. We literally finished our record, got it prepared, ready to go, and then I produced the 3teeth record while Juliette was producing a short film and then we started scoring a horror feature. We've just finished that.

**Are you going to do a tour for this latest release?**

SB : Right now we're working on some radio promotion stuff because we do feel that there's certain songs on this record that could really work well on radio. And normally the focus is always on pushing for licensing but this one seems like it has some legs for radio so we're going to try it.

JB : We're flirting with some festivals...

SB : Yeah, because we really want to take it out and play. So festivals would be a fun way to go. **A**

