

Arts and Leisure: Oscar in hand, Drexler went his own way

by Hiram Soto

Suppose you are Jorge Drexler, and you even have his boyish face at 42. So far, your musical career has been notable, but you've never really experienced mainstream fame and commercial success. Suddenly, you win an Oscar with the song "Al Otro Lado del Rio," featured in "The Motorcycle Diaries." You've become the first Latin American artist to win this prize. Everybody wants to interview you, talk to you, sing with you. And now you're about to write a new album.

What do you do?

A) You create an album filled with radio-friendly songs, solidifying your newfound fame and broadening your economic future.

B) You stop this train on its tracks, and you release the most introverted album of your career, packed with smart, melodic and powerful songs unlikely for radio.

C) You buy a small monkey and a music box, and you do shows on a busy street.

JORGE DREXLER - Academy Award winner Jorge Drexler describes his new album '12 Segundos in la Oscuridad' as personal, experimental and poetic. CNS Photo courtesy of MG Limited. Drexler said thank you but no thank you to fame and fortune when he wrote "12 Segundos en la Oscuridad," an album so personal that he had a difficult time seeing the lyrics come out of other singers' mouths. "I knew it was not the album I had to write if I was thinking of my career from the point of marketing," the Uruguayan singer said. "It's not an album for the masses."

So what is this album?

It's poetic. It's electronic and acoustic. It's experimental. It's fast, it's slow. It's modern, it's old. It's Jorge Drexler singing how 'life is more complicated than it looks' and of 'infidelity in the information age.'"

For the first time in his career, he wrote an album on the go.

It used to take Drexler weeks to write a song and months to conceptualize an album. He used to isolate

himself and concentrate on his work. But this one he wrote in hotel rooms, train stations, airports and trans-Atlantic flights. He set out to find the album. So he left Madrid, where he now lives, and found it in Cabo Polonio, a small, secluded coastal town where the Atlantic smashes against the small South American country of Uruguay.

He found inspiration in a light post that takes 12 seconds to complete a circle, and so the name of the album and the song. He then started adding music, including a rendition of Radiohead's "High and Dry."

"I liked that song a lot, and I thought that it would fit right in with South American guitars and the Uruguayan milonga," he said.

The album's guests include Argentinian singer Kevin Johansen, who sings backup. Drexler's 9-year-old son also sings backup, in "Disneylandia." The only guest that gets to sing alongside Drexler is Brazil's Maria Rita.

"The role of most of the guests is mostly for musical arrangement purposes," he said.

His concerts promise to be an intimate show, fitting for an artist who prefers small places over national auditoriums, and who prefers to see money and fame from "el otro lado del rio" (the other side of the river).

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