

*The Palm Reader and the Palm Writer*, the new release from Fort Collins indie-rock outfit Sour Boy, Bitter Girl, is the kind of record you can dance to and brood with at the same time.

The brood-worthy elements of the sound derive from the jaded yet rich bass voice of vocalist and multi-instrumentalist Benjamin Buttice—which sits somewhere between that of Matt Berninger of The National and that of Clay Rose of The Gasoline Lollipops—the deep, insistent resonance of Mitch Keller’s kick-heavy drum parts and the driving, full-toned quality of Alex Bailey’s bass.

Buttice adds electric guitar phrases laden with reverb, distortion and other, spacier effects, and synthesist Ben Wahamaki contributes a variety of intriguing textures.

The sound gathers urgency as deliberate, contemplative verses build, and tends to explode into subtle catchiness when the chorus hits. Hence the danceability.

But, the songs are more than successions of choruses and verses. Each one moves through several diverse passages.

The opening cut, entitled “Dresden,” begins with a slow, reverberating electric guitar lick that becomes a muted rhythm part when the vocals comes in. Later, the drums enter, precipitating a bright pre-chorus passage that includes a horn part, tenor vocal harmonies and crisp guitar fills. The chorus proper spreads over a sustained organ part. When the verse returns, it is supplemented by spacious rhythm piano. Interlocking phrases from an electric and an acoustic guitar usher in a final reprise.

Track six, called “Summers in Middle America,” opens with a catchy chord progression anchored by a brisk bass line that walks when the chord changes. A droning organ joins in on the second pass. Then, Keller, Bailey and Buttice lay down an emphatic pocket over which the vocals build to another climax. Bailey puts more bounce in his bass for verse two, and Buttice fills the space with spritely electric guitar phrases.

“Dragon’s Breath,” the penultimate cut, begins with what is arguably the record’s heaviest passage, then collapses into a pocket formed by reverberating guitar pulses and an eighth-note bass part. A sustained, synthesized organ part comes in on the second pass. Later, an acoustic guitar part leads into a driving chorus featuring lightly distorted vocal harmonies.

After the second chorus, the song enters a B section that starts with a quick acoustic chord progression, which gives way to heavy pulses comprised of cymbals, bass and distorted electric power chords. Bailey pushes into new territory with lilting bass lines that are eventually paralleled by acoustic and electric guitars. Then, power chords scream out over cymbals and a synth drone, echoing the chorus riff but flirting with atonality.

The tone of the guitar, the density of the bass parts and the tendency toward noisy, distorted catchiness give *The Palm Reader and the Palm Writer* a sound similar to that of ‘90s New York indie bands like The Strokes and Interpol. But this latest release proves that Sour Boy, Bitter Girl have a worthy and original voice to add to that lineage.