



My Brothers & Sisters
is an Art-Pop Spectacle based
in Kansas City, Missouri.

Boulevardia does it right the first time ...

Tim Finn – The Kansas City Star – June 15, 2014

My Brothers and Sisters forged on through the wind and some sound issues, which were rectified before their 40-minute set was over. Jamie Searle is the leader of the 12-piece band, which includes horns, strings and backup singers, and he led them through a set that featured music from the band's dandy genre-hopping full-length, "Violet Music," including "In My Sights" and "Fall Winter Spring and Summer." The crowd responded enthusiastically to the entire set, especially to a cover of Peter Gabriel's "Sledgehammer."

<http://www.kansascity.com/entertainment/ent-columns-blogs/back-to-rockville/article556830/Boulevardia-festival-gets-it-right-the-first-time-with-a-lively-mix-of-local-and-national-bands.html#storylink=cpy>



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Jamie Searle has a Grand Plan for My Brothers & Sisters

Natalie Gallagher - The Pitch - July 17, 2014

Rehearsals for My Brothers & Sisters are always a joyful, if not slightly chaotic, affair. Jamie Searle, the founder, guitarist and lead male singer for the 14-piece ensemble, manages the chaos in a rotating schedule.

"The only time the entire group is together is when we're onstage," Searle says with a laugh. "There are just too many of us to practice altogether."

On an early Friday evening, Searle is running through songs from the band's debut album, *Violet Music: Volume I*, with his four female singers: Tianna Echevannia, Angel Gibson, Kimberley Newsom and his wife, Melissa Backstrom. Bassist Dylan McGonigle is there, too, as is Searle's 5-month-old daughter, Nazra. The group is spread out in Searle's cozy Brookside living room.

As a subtle orange light filters through the windows, Searle commands his mini-choir with a conductor's precision, striding across the room from his guitar to his piano, punching keys and holding chords to the harmonies. Four voices merge together in "Pillow Bella," rising against the spicy, adventurous rhythm. (The song could be the next James Bond theme.) Shoulders groove. Gibson laughs as she misses a note. Baby Nezra coos from Backstrom's arms. Despite the flurry of energies and voices, the scene is serene.

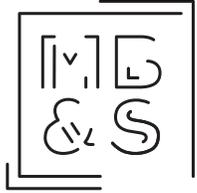
Serenity has been a long time coming. Before there was My Brothers & Sisters, there was *It's Over* — a four-piece band with a sound that Searle calls "post-punk math rock." With a smile and a shake of his head, he recalls being on tour with that band while also taking music-theory classes from Johnson County Community College.

"I would be on the road from Thursday through Sunday, playing shows, and Monday I would be studying formal music," Searle tells me as he sits in a patio chair in his backyard. "So you know there would be times where I would be in the sleaziest, greasiest bar, and I would be studying my theory book, and it would be hilarious to be in those moments — such a juxtaposition."

Searle began writing the material for My Brothers & Sisters in 2008, just as *It's Over* disbanded and he began coursework at the University of Missouri–Kansas City's Conservatory of Music. As Searle's studies expanded his musical vocabulary, he began to form an idea for a new project.

"I had just been writing a bunch of music, and I knew it was going to have horns," Searle says. "It wasn't like, 'Oh, I know some guy that plays horns,' or whatever. I had heard the music in my mind, wrote it out, and then gathered all these people together. Our first show in 2011 was actually with 18 people. Originally, there were six female singers and a full string quartet. I narrowed it down to just two violins and four female singers."

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My Brothers & Sisters, with its two violinists and full horn section in addition to the small army of female soul singers, is a fusion of sounds unlike anything Searle has been a part of. Since picking up the guitar at age 14, Searle had been trying to define who he was as a musician; his well-rounded resume starts with leading garage bands and runs to his present-day gigs as the hired gun for Sunday worship at a couple of local churches. Now, at 32, Searle believes he has finally found the sound that he has always been searching for.

But My Brothers & Sisters is not just one sound. The nature of Searle's homespun orchestra comes from his relentless pursuit of diverse music and his desire to represent the symphonies he hears in his head. On *Violet Music: Volume I*, smoky blues guitar roughens up smooth R&B notes ("I'll Be Leavin' With You"), hand-clapped choruses give pop songs a flamenco flair ("You Should Have Known") and various horns swell up for a storm of funk ("Fall Winter Spring & Summer").

The only thing that's more impressive than the mass of styles Searle incorporates in *Violet Music* is the way he merges them for a unified product. My Brothers & Sisters' debut is crafted with meticulous layers, and every song rolls beautifully into another.

"This album is the most creative, best thing I've ever done," Searle says without hesitation. "What I'm really interested in is doing music that's never been done — doing something that's really palatable, that sounds so familiar, but it's something else."

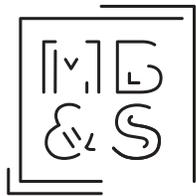
Searle hopes to break down a few more sonic boundaries with *Violet Music: Volumes II and III*.

"I would really like to work with Bollywood orchestras," Searle tells me, grinning at the thought. "If I could take traditional orchestra and blend it with Balinese music, and blend that with dubstep, and have this gorgeous melody."

When I tell Searle how impossible this sounds, he laughs and agrees. "But I know it can be done," he says. "That's what I'm going for — smooshing everything together."

He goes on: "I think what's difficult is that everyone puts themselves in, like, a place of, 'I'm only going to understand this in this context.' No one's really wanting to push all of these sounds together and figure out how to do it, and I'm starting to figure out how to do that."

<http://www.pitch.com/kansascity/my-brothers-and-sisters-kansas-city-jamie-searle/Content?oid=4249869>



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Album Review – Violet Music: Volume I

Angela Lupton – The Deli – April 11, 2014

My Brothers & Sisters is the brainchild and passion project of Jamie Searle. Since deciding to leave his former band—It's Over—to increase his knowledge of music, Jamie has been studying and working to compose, perform, and record Violet Music: Volume I.

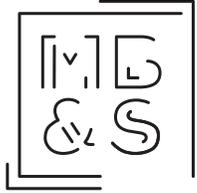
My Brother & Sisters is a large band reminiscent of the soul revues of the 1960s. Weighing in at a staggering 15 members, the band presses right into the listener with a force embodying Phil Spector's wall of sound. Violet Music: Vol I lifts off with "Fall Winter Spring & Summer." Insistent horns and punching guitar pull the listener in immediately. Try not to move. I dare you. Pay no mind to the lyrics seriously challenging you to follow your passion; you will dance whether you mean to or not.

From the frenetic pace of the opening track, the sparer "If Once" opens with just Searle's voice. Soon the band joins in and fills out the song that focuses on a person's search to balance priorities in life. "How to Move, What to Wear" departs from the established mood, floating in sultry and straightforward. It has a very Sade "By Your Side" vibe.

Keening strings welcome persistent percussion as Searle's voice takes on an almost Jack White sensibility in "In My Sights." "I'll Be Leaving with You," with its delicate string arrangement, beckons you to listen as Searle's voice—subdued and intimate—like he's singing to you alone in a crowded room trying to convince you to take him home. The smooth edges of "You Should Have Known" slide in and out of focus. Searle offers a cautionary tale poured in the calmest of voices served up with an I-told-you-so chaser. "Pillow Bella" has a Bollywood feel with the harmonies and pulsating rhythm of a Technicolor dance number. "The Devil & I" is that track you want to play when you get in the car after a long day—complex and mellow. I can see you now, windows down, singing along, "try to relax."

My Brothers & Sisters sends us on our way with "In You I Find." Sparing, compared to the rest of the album, this track seems lonely, like it is sitting on a fire escape in the rain, a love song fighting with the notion of all that has happened to the lovers before. This is a get-up-and-move record. Whether it is a slow dance or something to shake to depends onto which track you drop the needle.

<http://kansascity.thedelimagazine.com/17452/album-review-my-brothers-sisters-violet-music-volume-i>



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Songs from his soul: KC musician Jamie Searle tests his creative boundaries

Tim Finn - INK Magazine - May 6, 2014

In mid-April, Jamie Searle released "Violet Music: Volume 1," the inaugural recording by My Brothers and Sisters, the band he founded about five years ago. It's a sprawling work, a polyphonic parade into and through a variety of music genres — funk, soul, R&B, jazz, gospel — all written, charted, scored and orchestrated by Searle.

You could say Jamie Searle suffered for his art. He disappeared in the wilderness for it. He sold nearly all his possessions and moved into a windowless office space for it. He lost a lot of sleep — a lot of sleep — for it. And he obsessed about it to a point where friends and loved ones started to wonder whether his quest was devouring him.

You could also say Searle immersed himself in his art, devoted himself feverishly to creating and unleashing the lavish music he'd been hearing in his head since 2008.

You could say all of the above because it's all true. And if you wanted to blame (or credit) the Beatles for it, that would be true, too.

In mid-April, Searle released "Violet Music: Volume 1," the inaugural recording by My Brothers and Sisters, the band he founded about five years ago. It's a sprawling work, a polyphonic parade into and through a variety of music genres — funk, soul, R, jazz, gospel — all written, charted, scored and orchestrated by Searle. Nearly two dozen musicians worked on it. Recording took more than a year, involving three studios and two producers. And the budget well exceeded expectations.

Yet he finished it. And the week of its release, Searle was distributing copies, on vinyl and CD, to friends and colleagues like a new dad handing out cigars.

You could say this first-time father of a 4-month-old daughter is celebrating two births these days.

"The first time I heard the finished record, it was weird," he said. "It was nerve-racking and exciting. I wanted to make an album that hadn't been made yet, that didn't exist. When I heard it, I thought, 'I did that.'"

"So it's here now, but it doesn't really exist if people don't listen to it. So, I want people to hear it."

Searle didn't pick up a guitar until he was a teenager, but here was plenty of music in his life before that. He was born to a single mom in Protection, Kan., a speck of a town near the Oklahoma border. When he was 5, they moved in with his grandparents in Hays, Kan., so his mother could go to college. She wanted to become a teacher. That's when he discovered his first love.

"I really got into break-dancing," he said. "My grandparents had HBO, and the movie 'Breakin' 2' was really big. I completely loved it. I watched it over and over and learned all the moves."

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Music was a regular part of his environment. His mother was exposing Searle to funk, R and disco. "I heard a lot of Roberta Flack," he said. His grandfather introduced him to Herb Alpert the Tijuana Brass and country music. "I liked it all," Searle said. "I had no biases."

When he was 7, he and his mother moved to Kansas City so she could look for a teaching job. She ended up managing apartments. When Searle was 14, a friend showed him how to play Nirvana's "Come As You Are" on electric guitar.

"The moment I started playing, I thought, 'This is it,'" he said. "I stayed up all night, sitting on the edge of his bed, learning that song."

It wasn't the last time he lost a lot of sleep over music.

He was 16 when he started his first band, Cows Don't Eat Beef. It played loud, sloppy, hardcore punk — an expression of his teen alienation.

"I was really feeling a lot of pain in my life then," he said. "I had no father, my mom's gay, I was living in Kansas, going to a Catholic school (Bishop Miege). I was listening to Black Flag and Rage Against the Machine."

That band lasted one gig. "We played a birthday party on a porch in Overland Park," he said. "The cops were called right away and shut us down 15 minutes after we started."

His mother was wary of the music culture and its affiliation with drugs, so for a couple of years, Searle sequestered himself in his room, teaching himself guitar and learning the tricks of the masters, like Jimi Hendrix.

Then he met Bill Sundahl, a catalyst and co-conspirator in Searle's early music life. In 2001, when Searle was 19, they started the band It's Over. Its first incarnation was a more chaotic extension of Searle's first band.

"There was lots of yelling and screaming and rolling around onstage and knocking each other over," Sundahl said. "Lots of distorted guitars and overwrought bass lines. We both wrote lyrics to the same songs, often they had nothing to do with each other. It was close to punk, but not."

"At the time, we thought we were making brilliant art. I listened to some of it recently and thought, 'Wow.' And not 'wow' in a good way."

"Bill was into Pantera, we were both into Queens of the Stone Age," Searle said. "Lots of hardcore screaming stuff."

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It's Over rumbled and roared along for a few years, but by 2004, Searle was in his early 20s and no longer an angry teenager venting his angst. Instead, he was becoming more interested in songwriting and musicianship, a change that didn't dawn on him until he got hold of a copy of the Beatles' "Rubber Soul" album.

The first track on "Violet Music" is called "Fall Winter Spring Summer." It's a blast of orchestral rock with an array of accents: funk, R, pop. It's rife with riffs and runs and fills from horns, strings and guitars and lustrous vocals and layers of harmonies.

"It's a very thick and rich album," said Andy Oxman, who helped produce "Violet Music" at Soundworks Recording, the studio he owns in Blue Springs. "There is a lot going on most of the time. It's very dynamic."

Searle wrote, arranged, charted and scored everything on the album. He also sang lead vocals, played rhythm and lead guitar and added auxiliary percussion and synthesizers. The sound of My Brothers and Sisters is light-years away from the noise and fury issued by his first two bands.

And Searle says the Beatles were the catalyst for him to become a serious songwriter and musician. Specifically, it was the "Rubber Soul" album, when the Beatles were reaching their peak as songwriters and studio wizards.

"The first time I listened to 'Rubber Soul' I thought, 'I can't play these (It's Over) songs again,'" he said. "I felt such a sense of deliberation and so much invention in (the Beatles) music. I felt like I'd reached my limit in It's Over and I was repeating myself. So I started to write completely different songs. ... I was going to be serious about it."

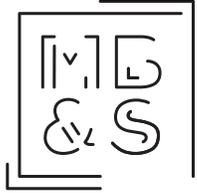
So he and bandmate Ryan Donegan started collaborating, changing the sound of It's Over dramatically. That was late 2004. Sundahl had left the band right at that transition but returned not long after. "I was an immediate fan of the new stuff," he said. "I really wanted back in."

"It was still kind of punk rock but with melodies," Oxman said. "It was like punk rock meets the Beatles."

It's Over toured regionally for three years and performed three times at the South by Southwest Music Conference in Austin, Texas. By then, Searle had grown increasingly interested in devouring as much as he could about music theory and history, so in 2007, he enrolled in music classes at Johnson County Community College.

He also started exploring classical music and big band jazz, devouring books and autobiographies (Quincy Jones) and studying scores (Tchaikovsky, Brahms). It all inspired him and aroused grander ideas.

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"I realized that where I was, I couldn't do what I wanted to do, what I was hearing in my head," he said. "I needed more help, more training."

It's Over called it quits in 2008, the same year Searle was accepted into the Conservatory of Music at UMKC. That was also the year he started composing songs for My Brothers and Sisters.

It didn't take forever to make "Violet Music," but it started to feel like it might. The entire process lasted about 18 months, required 23 musicians and comprised thousands of man-hours in the studio. Money became an issue.

In October 2012, Searle launched a Kickstarter campaign to cover the financing. More than 50 backers helped him exceed his goal of \$4,000 by nearly \$200.

"The Kickstarter really helped out," Searle said. "But I could see right away that it wasn't going to last, not when I'm paying a string quartet \$400 for three hours of time."

So he hatched a plan. On Craigslist, he found a low-rent office space in Grandview. Then he sold everything he owned — all but musical instruments, some books and all the clothes he could fit into one trunk. And he moved into the space, turning it into his living quarters and studio.

"I had a hot plate, some clothes, computer and my guitars because that was where I was doing my guitar parts for the record," he said. "I went to the community center every morning at 6:30 and showered." And then he went back to his office space and worked on his record, impressing his fellow tenants.

"I was always back there by 7:30, and other people in the building were like, 'That young man is really after it!'"

He was after it, all right, but "it" would take awhile. Because of the many parts he was recording, and because of his obsession to get them just right, tracking alone took a year, much longer than the few months Searle had anticipated.

"There were so many different musicians and pieces," Oxman said. "And Jamie is so meticulous."

"He tends to be a perfectionist," said Angel Gibson, one of four vocalists on the album. "It can get tedious. But he scores charts like no one else. Jamie is special. He wanted to make something that was beyond all of us. He always wanted something extra, something more. And we were all happy to be part of it."

Producer Joel Nanos was enlisted to mix and master the project at his Element Recording studio in Kansas City. It wasn't the usual project, he said.

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"Jamie threw everything he had into it, so there were a lot of files and parts to sort through," Nanos said. "I remember one song even being over 130 tracks. Most were over 75 at least. Sorting that out was a very big job.

"Each song really needed a unique approach. I somehow had to get all of those different sounds to jell. I wanted it to have a very timeless sound once it hit wax, like it could have been made in any decade."

Money wasn't the only challenge. The project was also taking a physical toll. Searle had left the conservatory about a semester short of graduation, frustrated with its approach and confident he could teach himself what he wanted to know.

But he was also working as a guitar instructor and had regular music gigs at two churches. He spent much of his waking time working on the project, grabbing cat naps here and there.

"I was working every night, sometimes until 4 in the morning, then I'd kind of pass out," he said. "I'd get up and pour coffee down my throat to stay awake."

The lack of sleep and money issues eventually got to him.

"I reached a point where I started having doubts about whether this was the right thing to do," he said. "A lot of people started worrying about me. They told me I was starting to lose it a little. I was feeling so exhausted. I started to wonder, 'Is this taxing the people I love?'"

But there were moments when inspiration would arrive and revive him. Like the time he'd left his office bunker for a week and went off into the woods to "fish and live like a wild man."

"There's a song on the album, 'I'll Be Leaving With You,'" he said. "For months, I had the first two lines of that song, nothing else. I didn't push it. I knew the rest of the song would come to me eventually. I was on a hike, and it came to me. I ran back to my campsite and wrote the rest. Moments like that, where you capture the soul of the song, are so rewarding.

"So I decided that, right or wrong, I was going to finish the album, no matter what."

In October, Searle moved into a Brookside house with Melissa Backstrom, a singer he met while recording the project. She is the mother of their daughter, Nazra, born in December, a few months before the album was officially done.

Asked to describe the sound of My Brothers and Sisters and "Violet Music," Searle is careful with his words. "I say we're a 14-piece pop orchestra that covers a lot of styles," he said.

Asked what was most gratifying about making the album, Searle said, "Working with so many great people in so many fields: musicians, engineers, designers. I learned so much. I learned a lot about myself."

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The feeling is mutual. “Jamie is a really interesting guy,” said Michael Gregory, who played guitar on the album. “His take on music is really unique.”

“I’m very proud of the finished product,” Nanos said.

Despite all the expense, time and sacrifice, you could say Jamie Searle is satisfied with the process and the results.

“I’m feeling real positive about the future,” Searle said. “Yeah, it took awhile, but I’m real proud of the record and proud of everyone who worked on it.”

Sundahl agrees: “I think now that it’s out, no one is going to remember it took forever to come out. They’ll just think it’s a great record.”

<http://www.kansascity.com/entertainment/article351454/Songs-from-his-soul-KC-musician-Jamie-Searle-tests-his-creative-boundaries.html#storylink=cpy>



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Mills Record Company Blog Album Reviews

Brian Clifton – 2014

My Brothers and Sisters fill the stage with sound and people. The seemingly infinite number of members of this pop orchestra give their live performance a James Brown feel. With a band so large, it would be easy to make music that was muddled in the worst way. My Brothers and Sisters skillfully avoids this making surprisingly crisp and intricate dance-pop. My favorite track is “How To Move What To Wear.”

<http://millsrecordcompany.com/pitch-music-awards-preview-album-year/>

Mills Record Company Blog

Brian Clifton – June 1, 2015

My Brothers and Sisters fill the stage with sound and people. The band’s hot, James Brown feel makes them a force to be reckoned with both on record and on stage. My Brothers & Sisters sounds like the crispest pop on its debut and like the funkiest big band on stage. These two feels makes the band surprisingly dynamic. Truly My Brothers & Sisters can fill a variety of sounds and roles, seemingly without trying.

<http://millsrecordcompany.com/crossroads-summer-block-party/>



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KCUR's Band of the Week

Bill Brownlee – June 14, 2017

My Brothers & Sisters is a large Kansas City collective that adds psychedelic flourishes to rock, funk and soul. In characteristically purple prose, the band refers to itself as “the ascetic bloodhounds of immortal sonic ecstasy.”

They deliver a powerful live performance. The nine or more musicians who squeeze onto stages during My Brothers & Sisters shows induce wide smiles and uninhibited dancing.

They perform on the main stage of the Boulevardia festival on Saturday and headline the late show at RecordBar on Friday, pledging that show will be a “surrealist art-pop dream party.”

“Fall, Winter, Spring and Summer,” the lead track on their 2014 album Violet Music, provides a taste of what audiences can expect. It includes a horn section, strings, handclaps, a full chorus and bandleader Jamie Searle’s distinctive warble.

<http://kcur.org/post/kcurs-band-week-my-brothers-sisters#stream/0>

Folsom Prison Premiere

Skope Magazine – April 13, 2017

MY BROTHERS & SISTERS deliver an intense revision of this iconic Johnny Cash hit. A dark and stirring video is due for release in early Summer 2017. Stay tuned to this Art-Pop Juggernaut.

<https://skopemag.com/2017/04/13/premiere-my-brothers-sisters-folsom-prison-re-imagination>