

THE JAPONIZE ELEPHANTS biography

Adroitly bounding between cinematic melodies, surf guitar, spy soundtracks, Appalachian fiddling, lush string arrangements, clawhammer banjo, country ballads, eastern modes, 4-part vocal harmonies, Mariachi flair and heavy jazz, the new Japonize Elephants album, *Melodie Fantastique*, is an inimitable take on the modern American experience. Songs about space travel, Publishers Clearing House, pirates, buses, and whiskey intermingle with instrumental numbers showcasing highly developed melodic and harmonic vocabularies. The sound is twisted and ambitious yet instantly recognizable, the result of nearly 20 years of collaborative experimentation fostered in a D.I.Y. environment. Though many styles and genres are hinted at in the course of a Japonize Elephants song, the choices are never ironic or insincere.

Melodie Fantastique, the band's fourth album, features the entire cast of musicians that have inhabited its ever-shifting 18-year history. The new record was conceived from the beginning as a studio album in contrast to the live-recording style of the previous three albums. The band convened in San Francisco in December 2007 for a week of flushing out arrangements, lyrics, and tracking, which was to be followed by one month of overdubs and experimental studio "magic." Tragically, during the initial recording process longtime member and beloved friend Evan Farrell died of smoke inhalation in a house fire in Oakland. Work on the album came to a halt. In time, the band realized that the album needed to be finished, and in light of these terrible circumstances, it had taken on new significance. Over the following five year period, producer and founding member, Sylvain Carton, recorded each band member in every conceivable, available space - from closets, hallways, bedrooms and stairwells to living rooms, bathrooms, dance studios and so on. Finally in June 2012 the record was complete.

Proudly hailing from the fertile Bloomington, Indiana music scene of the early 1990s as music and art students, the Japonize Elephants brought together the formal training of the conservatory and the organic flux of music at large in their community to form a truly unique combination of both. Employing an extremely varied instrumentation featuring glockenspiel, junk percussion, vibraphone, accordion, guitar, bass, flute, saxophones, trumpet, violin, banjo, and vocals, the new genre of Cinematic-Old-Time-Eastern-Honk arose!

The Japonize Elephants' first two albums, *Bob's Bacon Barn* (1996) and *La Fete du Cloune Pirate* (1997), were released on Secretly Canadian Records and showcase the development of this new brand of music. On *Bob's Bacon Barn*, the Elephants blend the sounds of Appalachia with European circus tunes and 'Eastern-honk.' CMJ opined, "Bob's Bacon Barn is a jumbled aural dish taken from a smorgasbord of musical genres, including styles borrowed from the Far East and southern Kentucky...just when the flutes and violins hint at an Asian influence, the song changes to a bluegrass hoe-down and then it's all smashed together."

With the release of *La Fete du Cloune-Pirate*, the ensemble began to incorporate jazz composition techniques and more classical elements into their original "barrelhouse" sound. This transitional album shows the Elephants integrating their influences into a mature, distinct style. *Denver Post* wrote, "Listening to The Japonize Elephants is like being at a supersonic hillbilly hoedown that has mysteriously been transplanted into a Transylvanian cartoon."

These albums solidified Japonize Elephants line-up including Sylvain Carton (guitar, vocals), David Gantz (junk, vocals), Jason Slota (vibes, glockenspiel), Megan Gould (violin), Evan Farrell (bass, vocals), Chris Hiatt (flute), Mitch Marcus (tenor sax, piano), and Jeremy Baron (banjo). This lineup toured America



extensively in a converted yellow "short" bus - each show contributing to the expanding musical canon of the Elephants and tightening the bond between band members.

In 1999, The Japonize Elephants hoisted their entire musical society from Bloomington and relocated to Oakland, California. As a San Francisco Bay Area-based band, the Japonize Elephants were joined by Dina Maccabee (violin, voice), Michael Mellender (bass, voice), George Ban-Weiss (bass), Charles Ferris (trumpet), Isabel Douglas (accordion), Marie Abe (accordion), and David Phillips (pedal steel). Their self-released 2002 album, *40 Years of Our Family*, presented a new vitality and growth to the music - a more defined "sound" of the band. This album is replete with tall tales of West Oakland, circus-y melodies, swank tangos, lush harmonies, as well as a wide range of vocal stylings, with a smidgen of Dixieland and ragtime thrown in.

Comprised of the most versatile and professional musicians around, it is no surprise that members of Japonize Elephants also perform and record regularly with a huge array of international artists including Beats Antique, Sleepytime Gorilla Museum, John Vanderslice, Radio Lab, Aphrodesia, RVSQ, Mads Tolling Quartet, Debo Band, Aaron Freeman (Ween), Donovan, Monika Jalili, Mavrothis Kontanis, Rogue Wave, NY Arabic Orchestra, and Feist.

For press materials or additional information on Japonize Elephants, the album *Mélodie Fantastique*, or to set up interviews please contact Fly PR: T. (323) 667-1344 or flypr@flypr.net.

