

***“More fun than fusion has any right to be.” – Rhythm Magazine (UK)***

**The Aristocrats:**

**Instrumental Rock/Fusion’s “Rowdy New Democracy”**

The word “supergroup” is tossed around a lot in instrumental music circles, the result of a seemingly endless supply of efforts to package together individual virtuoso players and make a band out of them. But every once in a while, the *group* part of that shopworn term becomes authentic and real. Such is the case with The Aristocrats – guitarist Guthrie Govan, bassist Bryan Beller, and drummer Marco Minnemann – who defiantly and joyously blow the supergroup stereotype to bits, thrilling audiences and fans around the world in the process with a preternatural band chemistry that equals exponentially more than the sum of its parts.

Let’s get the requisite individual credentials out of the way:

\* Guthrie Govan is arguably *the* hottest guitarist on the international music scene today, and his 2006 solo album *Erotic Cakes* was widely recognized as an instant classic. His top-level touring experience (Asia/GPS, Steven Wilson) complements his busy schedule as one of the most in-demand guitar clinician/educators in the world, and he was featured on the cover of *Guitar Player* Magazine in July of 2011;

\* Bryan Beller’s numerous credits include guitarists Steve Vai, Joe Satriani, Mike Keneally (Frank Zappa), and the hugely popular metal “band” Dethklok, borne of the Adult Swim (U.S.) animated TV show *Metalocalypse*. His solo artist catalog includes three CD’s, two DVD’s, and an instructional DVD for Alfred Publishing, and he was featured on the cover of *Bass Player* Magazine in October of 2012;

\* Marco Minnemann is widely seen by fans and peers as one of the most gifted, innovative, cutting-edge drummers in the world. He’s graced the covers of several drum magazines (including *Modern Drummer*) and enjoys an ultra-versatile sideman career (Adrian Belew, UKZ, Steven Wilson, Joe Satriani, Necrophagist). Perhaps less known: He’s a multi-instrumentalist and compulsively productive composer with nearly *twenty* CD & DVD solo releases to date.

Despite their individual followings, The Aristocrats’ formation was a matter of happenstance on a barely-paying gig. Beller and Minnemann had a trio slot scheduled at the Winter NAMM show in Anaheim, CA in January of 2011, and their guitarist was a late dropout. Govan was a last-minute replacement who they met for the first time in rehearsal, the night before the show. The electricity was *immediately* obvious, with their unbeknownst-to-them shared influences infusing a high-energy instrumental fusion with an aggressive, playful, even cheeky edge. The audience response was overwhelming, and the band formed practically by demand on the spot. “The chemistry was so great,” recalls Govan, “that when we came offstage we all said to each other, ‘This is working. We should record this.’”

Three months later, the band convened in person – eschewing the usual remote file sharing method in favor of actual live band chemistry – to track the album. Consisting of nine tracks (three contributions from each member), the material was a melting pot of their respective influences, ranging from the seminal '70s jazz-rock fusion of Return To Forever and Mahavishnu Orchestra, to the progressive rock of King Crimson and UK, to guitar heroes like Steve Vai and Joe Satriani, to the absurdly complex and satirical music of Frank Zappa and Mike Keneally, and even to '90s groove metal like Rage Against The Machine.

Beller says of the tunes, “We ended up using our different influences to write *for* each other. I wrote “Sweaty Knockers” specifically for Guthrie to have fun with, while Guthrie wrote “I Want A Parrot” with bass leads in mind. As for Marco’s material, we’re just lucky to be able to keep up with it.”

The ever-mischievous Minnemann’s song titles – such as “Boing!...I’m In The Back” (borne from a publicly indescribable incident in Russia) and “Blues Fuckers” (in which a typical blues form is violated in every way imaginable) – along with Beller’s “Sweaty Knockers,” prompted Govan to wonder if the band shouldn’t be named The Aristocrats, after the infamous dirty joke and movie of the same name. It stuck, and The Aristocrats were born.

Tracked in just eight days, *The Aristocrats* [BOING, 2011] was hailed as an instant classic in leading music publications worldwide, appearing on many of that year’s top ten lists. Guthrie Govan suddenly found himself on guitar magazine covers across the globe. Music schools in particular felt the impact, as a wave of students took to covering Aristocrats tunes much in the same way Steve Vai’s *Passion And Warfare* inspired players a generation ago. In less than a year, The Aristocrats went from doing a single pickup gig to becoming one of the most sought-after live instrumental rock/fusion acts in the world.

The next 18 months saw the band successfully tour both coasts and the Midwest/mid-south of America, eastern Canada, the U.K., Benelux, France, Spain, Sweden, Italy, Germany, Poland, Croatia, Turkey, Greece, Israel, Korea, and Japan. The band’s live energy and otherworldly chemistry was captured on the DVD/2CD release *BOING, We’ll Do It Live! The Aristocrats At Alvas Showroom* [BOING, 2012].

In 2013, the band released their long-awaited sophomore album, *Culture Clash*, whose title is an allusion to the multi-national makeup of the band (Govan is British; Beller is American; Minnemann is German), as well as a sly reference to a scene from the Coen-brothers film *A Serious Man*. They used the same formula – three songs from each band member – but weaponized it with the collective experience of eighteen months of touring as a unit. The resulting material became more aggressive, adventurous, and intense, embodying a refusal to rest on the laurels of the debut album’s surprise success. Featuring everything from techno-fusion (Minnemann’s “Dance Of The Aristocrats”) to nitro-powered rockabilly (Beller’s “Louisville Stomp”) to Govan’s rhythmically serpentine title track, *Culture Clash* was another success, debuting on the Billboard

Contemporary Jazz Charts at #8...though no one would immediately classify the band as jazz. (They're having way too much fun for that!)

2013 also saw the band embark upon their longest U.S. tour to date, a six-week sellout-filled romp through the east, midwest, southeast and Texas. In 2014, the band plans to tour the U.S. Southwest, California, Mexico, Europe, South America, and Southeast Asia.

The key thing to remember is that The Aristocrats are a true *band*. Whether it's about the music, the touring plans, the record artwork and sequence, the business decisions, or what have you, everyone has an equal say. Perhaps Guthrie said it best when he used the phrase "a rowdy democracy of musicianship."

It's not just fusion. It's not just shredding. It's not even meant to be taken seriously at times. It's just the sound of three guys who did a single pickup gig and suddenly discovered they had something musically deep going on together...along with a propensity for employing R-rated song titles.

So what do you call an act like that?

*The Aristocrats.*