FULL BIO (long version)

The Aristocrats: Instrumental Rock/Fusion’s “Rowdy New Democracy”

Over the past eight years The Aristocrats have released critically acclaimed albums, toured the world, and established themselves as one of the most musically original, refreshingly irreverent, and astoundingly entertaining instrumental rock-fusion acts on the planet. Anyone who’s witnessed their live musical high-wire act - employing random amounts of rock, jazz, pop, metal, and even traditional country – can attest that it is informed by the spirit of a true band, one whose improvisational soul allows for anything to happen onstage at any moment...including the occasional wink and nod at the audience.

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, Hans Zimmer) complements his busy schedule as one the most in-demand guitar clinician/educators in the world. Guthrie was featured on the cover of Guitar Player Magazine in July of 2011 and Guitar World Magazine in April 2015

* 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, Steve Hackett). Perhaps less known: Marco is also a multi-instrumentalist and compulsively productive composer with over 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.

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. Culture Clash debuted on the Billboard Contemporary Jazz Chart at #8 ...though no one would immediately classify the band as jazz. (They’re having way too much fun for that!)

Another more ambitious 109-date world tour followed, bringing the band across the entire U.S., to Europe, and this time to all of Asia. Some of the more exotic tour stops included Vietnam, Thailand, and Iceland. The around-the-world madness was documented on the live CD/DVD Culture Clash Live, which was released in early 2015. The universally positive reviews
reflected the accurate capturing of the band’s madcap live show, with equal parts virtuosity and absurdity. One particularly perceptive UK reviewer (Echoes And Dust) noted it as follows: “There is so much good humour infused in every bar that every track is a delight, a charging rhino in a pink tutu.”

Fresh off the wildly successful Culture Clash world tour, The Aristocrats proceeded to rewrite their own rules for their third studio album, Tres Caballeros, which was released in late June of 2015.

After two fairly raw trio albums, the band set up camp in February of 2015 at legendary Sunset Sound studios in Hollywood, CA, where Led Zeppelin, The Rolling Stones and Van Halen all recorded landmark albums. The result: Nine new compositions of greater sonic depth and breadth than ever before, with unique textures and lush layering augmenting the band’s preternatural ability to improvise both individually and as a group at the highest levels possible. But not to worry – it was all still tempered with a steadfast refusal to take themselves too seriously, and The Aristocrats were still having more fun than a fusion band has any right to have.

“We’d learned a lot since we started this band and I think this particular offering reflected this in all kinds of ways,” says guitarist Guthrie Govan. “The decision to road-test the material in front of a live audience before commencing the recording process; the choice to record in a studio which had some thoroughly inspiring rock’n’roll “mojo”; our sudden urge to become more bold and experimental with overdubs rather than feeling any pressure to record exclusively in a strict “trio” format... all of this had some kind of positive effect on the way the new record came out. Plus, I think the material on this album is some of the most interesting stuff we’ve ever written for each other, so...here's hoping our noble listeners liked the finished product as much as we did!”

The Tres Caballeros world tour began in summer 2015 with an 8-week stint across North America, followed by a winter European leg, a short landmark stint as the third “G” in a G3 tour with Steve Vai and Joe Satriani (the first time any “band” became a “G” on that bill), and tour dates in 2016 throughout Asia, Australia and South America.

Fast forward to 2019 and The Aristocrats have just recorded their most ambitious and exploratory album in their eight year history. You Know What…? is their fourth studio album and includes nine new tracks recorded at Brotheryn Studios, Ojai, CA.

In true Aristocratic tradition, each band member wrote and produced three songs which were brought to life in the studio thanks to the band’s instinctive chemistry and shared musical vocabulary. Having taken a little time away to work on other projects, the band were excited to be
back together doing what they do best and producing a sound that’s at once fresh and new but unmistakably the work of The Aristocrats with their trademark blend of discipline and musical freedom. True to form, the album doesn’t hitch its wagon to any one genre. The only rules the trio live by are that the music must be pleasurable for the listener and it most definitely has to be fun to play.

A glance at the track listing for You Know What…? may cause some raised eyebrows from those unfamiliar with the band. For fans however, it’s a tantalizing glimpse of the stories behind the songs that the band will soon be sharing with audiences all over the world on their upcoming world tour, which begins in North America this summer. From the filthy, greasy rock of "D Grade F*ck Movie Jam" and "Terrible Lizard", to the quirky anything-goes madness of "Spiritus Cactus" and "Spanish Eddie", to the lavishly arranged "Burial At Sea" and "When We All Come Together", and to the timeless melodies of "All Said And Done" and Last Orders", You Know What…? is an album full of addictive grooves, high energy jamming and seemingly impossible musical twists and turns. The Aristocrats are undoubtedly back and ready to blow some minds.

The band are pretty pleased with how it turned out, commenting that: “On You Know What…?, we feel like we inspired each other as songwriters and musicians to do things we’ve never done before as a band. We know each other pretty well now, and we used that familiarity to really get after it in the studio and push the boundaries of what we can accomplish on a record. And still, it’s totally, completely an Aristocrats album. We think it’s the coolest thing we’ve done yet by far.”

* * * * * * * *

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.