

THE ARISTOCRATS – FEB 2024 FULL BIO

The Aristocrats: Instrumental Rock/Fusion's "Rowdy New Democracy"

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

Over the past ten 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, country, and everything in between – 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 Frank-Zappa-influenced 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 of 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 series *Metalocalypse*. His solo artist catalog includes three studio albums (including 2019's rave-reviewed progressive double concept album *Scenes From The Flood*), two DVD's, 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). Marco is also a multi-instrumentalist and compulsively productive composer with over twenty CD & DVD solo releases to date, including two albums with his most recent collaboration McStine & Minnemann.

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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.

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 100+ 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."

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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.

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After a brief European tour in 2018, the following year saw The Aristocrats record their most ambitious and exploratory album to date. Their fourth album, ***You Know What...?*** [BOING, 2019] was recorded at Brotheryn Studios in bucolic Ojai, CA. The band found themselves rejuvenated by their short break, and dove deeper than ever into new sounds and richer songwriting to produce their deepest, most diverse work yet. 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...?*** was an album full of addictive grooves, high energy jamming and seemingly impossible musical twists and turns.

In a stroke of calendar luck, the band was able to complete another successful tour of both North America and Europe, the latter of which concluded on March 6, 2020, just five days before trans-Atlantic flights were shut down and the COVID lockdown began. Just three weeks before then, the band was peaking and played some of their best shows of the tour. These shows were captured to become the source for the band’s third live album, ***FREEZE! Live In Europe 2020*** [BOING, 2021]. Leaning hard on the *You Know What...?* material, it was a way to remind fans around the world just how electrifying the band would be when live shows were once again possible.

The band also marked the lockdown era with another creative first: The orchestral collaboration project ***The Aristocrats With Primuz Chamber Orchestra*** [BOING, 2022]. The album reveals a lush and lavish musical reimagination and sonic reinvention of compositions from throughout the band’s storied catalog.

“This project began when we randomly stumbled upon a YouTube video of Poland’s Primuz Chamber Orchestra performing one of our songs, as reimaged by composer/arranger Wojtek Lemański,” the band says in a unified statement. “Their flawless execution of a highly challenging arrangement (which was startlingly inventive and yet remained entirely faithful to the spirit of the original composition!) inspired us to reach out and propose a collaboration.”

The complete work comprises nine trio performances taken from the band’s previous studio albums, remixed from the ground up by award-winning engineer Forrester Savell and utterly transformed and reinvented by the orchestra’s stirring rendition of Wojtek Lemański’s string arrangements.

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But the spirit of The Aristocrats has always been as a live band, and they couldn't wait to get back out on the road. When regular touring resumed in the summer of 2022, they kicked off another year-long worldwide jaunt, The **DEFROST** tour. Their triumphant return to over a hundred stages across North America, Asia and Europe showed the band was hungrier than ever. Their fans were even hungrier, marking the tour with some of the group's biggest shows to date.

Being able to travel and gather once again also meant they could resume their studio mission as well – because the band has always believed in gathering and collaborating in person to make albums. So four years after **You Know What**, and in the midst of the **DEFROST** tour, the band began work on their most ambitious studio project to date: *a concept album*. **Duck** is the story of a web-footed Antarctic island native fleeing a penguin policeman all the way to New York City...where considerable misadventure and danger await. The new album releases on February 16, 2024, coinciding with the **DUCKLING** tour, a series of five select USA west coast dates to celebrate the occasion. **Duck** takes The Aristocrats' collective artistry to a whole new mindblowing – albeit ridiculous – level. More touring is sure to follow.

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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.

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