Dump City Gutter

catching runoff from umph tour

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When we last met, Umphrey's McGee was rockin' two sold out nights at Chicago's Navy Pier Skyline Stage. As usual, the shows highlighted the fact that Umphrey's continues to grow in popularity and talent. This fall also saw this Midwest sextet play a two-night run at Madison Wisconsin's famed Barrymore Theatre as well as a slot at the inaugural Vegoose Festival in Las Vegas, Nevada. The boys lit up the festival grounds with a smokin' set filled with some of their most exciting & adventurous numbers, but the real excitement actually came an evening prior to their festival performance. Umphrey's set up shop at the House of Blues Las Vegas in the beautiful Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino. Their more than three-hour show consisted of some amazing jams as well as a slew of first time covers - "Helter Skelter" & "Dig A Pony" by the Beatles; "Red" by King Crimson; "Wild Side" by Motley Crue & a full version of Led Zeppelin's "Immigrant Song". All-around bad-ass Warren Haynes joined the guys for "Immigrant Song" & moe.'s Al Schnier joined in for a tasty version of "Partyin' Peeps". Umphrey's continued to spread their love across the nation & the fans came out in droves. Highlights for the fall tour included a sold-out show at Washington D.C.'s 9:30 club & two sold-out nights at New York City's Irving Plaza. The boys spent the beginning of December back out west, but returned in time for Brendan & Jake's annual acoustic Christmas. The duet played this year's party at Chicago's Park West & had Joel open the evening with a beautiful solo piano set. Many other friends joined throughout the evening & the listeners were privy to some new material.



Ryan & Brendan
In the Studio
Photo by Brett Saul

Now as we gather for a New Year's Eve extravaganza, 2005 is melting away behind us & we have another year to look forward to. 2006 will surely see Umphrey's continuing to grow by leaps & bounds. They will release their third official studio album (see interview with Sound Caresser Kevin Browning for details inside) & will visit venues new & old across the U.S. & Europe.

As per usual, the year's touring itinerary begins adrift. January 7th - 13th, Umphrey's join Bela Fleck and the Flecktones, Galactic, Digable Planets, Keller Williams, Steve Kimock Band, Karl Denson's Tiny Universe & many others aboard the fourth annual Jam Cruise. February will find Umphrey's warming up in the Midwest (2/8 at Iowa Memorial Union in Iowa City, Iowa; 2/9 at First Avenue in Minneapolis, Minnesota; 2/10 at The Rave in Milwaukee, Wisconsin & a yet to be determined venue on 2/11) before heading out East. While in the New England area, they will make stops in Rhode Island (2/15 at Lupo's Heartbreak Hotel in Providence), Vermont (2/16 at Higher Ground in Burlington), New York City (2/17 at the Nokia Theatre), New Jersey (2/18 at Starland Ballroom in Sayreville) & Maryland (2/20 at Ram's Head in Baltimore). Then it's down the coast to North Carolina (2/21 at Neighborhood Theatre in Charlotte) & up through Tennessee (2/22 at City Hall in Nashville) before a couple more shows in the Midwest (2/23 at Bogart's in Cincinnati, Ohio; 2/24 at The Pageant in St. Louis, Missouri & 2/25 at the Murat's Egyptian Room in Indianapolis, Indiana).

March will find Umphrey's playing their first festival of the year at Sunrise Florida's Langerado Music Festival - alongside Ben Harper and the Innocent Criminals, The Black Crowes, The Flaming Lips, The Meters, Wilco, Robert Randolph and the Family Band, The Disco Biscuits, Burning Spear, Clap Your Hands and Say Yeah, RJD2, Kid Koala, Brothers Past, and many others. Then a milestone in Umphrey's McGee history will transpire with the first ever European tour. Umphrey's will make stops in London, England (3/14 at the Mean Fiddler); Milan, Italy (3/15 at the Transilvania Club); Paris, France (3/16 at La Boule Noir) & in Amsterdam - for the second annual Jam in the 'Dam with The Disco Biscuits, The Benevento-Russo Duo & STS9 (3/19-21) - before hitting the Knust in Hamburg, Germany (3/23) & back to the States. Have a great tour & we'll see you on the road. Feel free to send any comments, questions or concerns to dcgutter@yahoo.com & remember, things change, so check www.umphreys.com before you book that flight.

Matt Kanable



Kevin Browning
In the Studio
Photo by Brett Saul

Sweet Caressing
An interview with Kevin Browning - Sound Caresser

How does the band choose which songs to put on a studio album with such a large catalog of songs?

When it comes to choosing songs, there are a variety of factors that get considered. To put things in perspective, we recorded a total of 24 songs and ended up choosing 11 for the record. You have to pick songs that fit the feel and the flow of the album. As a result sometimes you have to cut tunes that everyone really likes but just don't seem to fit for one reason or another. As for choosing the tunes, we are a democracy and majority rules. Some choose to be more active, some less but everyone contributes in their own important and impactful way.

Tell me a little bit about the recording process itself.

The majority of basic tracking was done in a live setting. That being said, months of additional tracking were done on a one on one basis. Drums and Bass are key for laying the foundation and almost all of those are done live - We then go back and add layers and textures of melody and rhythm instruments until we are happy. That's the beauty of the studio, you record something, put it on the shelf for a week, revisit it, decide you want to add (or subtract) something, stew on that for a week and repeat. If we never had to actually put an album out, we can work on it for years and years fine tuning and adding various ear candy.

When you go into the studio, what are you trying to accomplish, as opposed to playing a live show?

In the studio the focus is on making a cohesive and succinct collection of songs that work well together. As all of you know, live - anything goes. It just depends on what night you show up. There are certainly elements that overlap between the two but we really approach the two differently. The studio provides you the opportunity to use instruments and sounds that we don't have the ability to pull off nightly (yet ;) This record has a variety of additional instruments including a good dose of acoustic guitars, cello, sax, harp, melodica, amongst others.

How did this album differ in production from the first two?

Significantly. This album we did all the basic tracking (drums, bass, guitars, some keys) to 2" tape which makes all the difference. Staying in the analog realm for these core tracks has certain sonic characteristics that digital has yet to be able to match. It gives your drums a natural compression and punch that you don't get recording to a computer. But digital has provided us with opportunities that our analog fore bearers did not have. So this record is a healthy combination of both formats. We tried to take advantage of the benefits of both while minimizing the shortcomings that each format possesses.

If you had a choice of being in the studio for a month or going on the road for a month, which would you choose?

Um...I'll take what's behind door number 1. Don't get me wrong, I love mixing live but I still don't feel like we have had the time to really fully develop our studio craft. This record is by far the best one we've made but if we could afford to set up shop for several months at a time, I can only imagine what we'd come up with. Plus, I get to see my wife more when I'm in the studio and you can't put a price on that.

What is the big difference between the two environments?

The difference between the two is immense but the principals of audio are the principals of audio no matter where you are mixing. In the live realm, you have a finite amount of time to set up and pull off your show. Load in is at 1 o'clock and the show is at 9 o'clock and that's that. Whatever happens, however the day goes, show time is show time. Sometimes there are certain technical malfunctions, buzzes, weird anomalies that you can mask and cover up live. They tuck themselves under the noise of a crowd. In a studio, if something isn't working or you don't like a tone you spend as much time as you need to get it right. If you do a take but decide you don't like the position of the floor tom mic, you move it and do it again. Every single thing is under a microscope in the studio environment so every single thing requires that much more caressing if you will.

From Iraq With Love

I have always been into music - for as long as I can remember. When I was 16 I bought tickets to my first Phish show. It was amazing & I never missed any of their shows at Alpine Valley, until I joined the Marines - luckily they played their summer run there before I deployed. One last good time & I left three days later - man would my life change. I enlisted on July 16th 2000; thought it would be a good chance for me to change my ways and settle down a little on the party scene. At that time there were no conflicts going on in the world (pre Bush) and I figured "what the hell. I get to travel the world and get paid for it." Well we all know what happened on September 11, 2001 & our President's following reaction. My last Phish show was a sad one at Coors Amphitheatre in San Diego. It had been 3 years and boy had they changed, I soon left for the Middle East for 2 years. I came home for a couple of months, but I reserved most of my time for my wife.

I had always been told that I should check out Umphrey's McGee, but it never quite worked out. I missed them at Summer Fest, I missed them in San Diego. It just never happened. I was in Iraq, bored out of my mind and needed some new music: I bought 'Anchor Drops' and fell in love. I would sit out there on my chopper at night and just jam to the album for hours - It was so peaceful in a horribly war torn country.

I returned in April 2005 to San Diego. My buddy and I were going through The Reader [a local newspaper] around three in the morning, after a night on the town. When he declared, "Hey E, Umphrey's is playing next week, we should go." - I bought tickets the next morning. The day of the show I didn't know what to expect, I couldn't contain myself - I was so excited. We got there early and jammed out to some drum and bass. My friends weren't into it as much as I was and I ended up losing them. I made my way to the front row and waited. Along the way, I met some awesome people. We talked for a while and chilled. Then it happened, Umphrey's took the stage and changed my life.

They started rocking right away - I didn't know what to do so I just started yelling and dancing; I had so much fun. About half way through

The live environment always has dozens of variables that you must just [have to] deal with, the room is overly reverberant, the stage is hollow and resonates at an annoying frequency, the power isn't as clean as you'd like it and on and on and on. The studio is like a lab where you have control over all those variables. If you want it less reverberant, put up some additional baffling, if you want it more reverberant, record in a bigger room. The studio allows me a greater deal of flexibility than I have live.

But all that being said, I love them both and embrace the challenges and rewards that they both possess. My goal is to try and fuse the two so that we are able to pull off live what we can pull off in the studio. As technologies improve and we can be more selective in choosing our venues, I think the two can live harmoniously side by side.

Where is the album being produced, and how is the progress?

Pre-production, writing, and scratch recording were done in January of 2005 at Manny's Studio. Basic tracking and recording was done at the end of January and first part of February, 2005 at Gravity Studios in Chicago. Additional recording, tracking, mixing, editing, arranging, etc, etc, etc. has been done in countless studios, hotel rooms, tour buses, back stages. That's the beauty of technology, it's quite mobile.

And I can finally say after 11 months of work, it is finally DONE. I wasn't sure if it was ever going to happen but its official, it is finished. We are waiting on cover from Storm Thorgerson (go look up his work. Best known for many Floyd covers but has done oodles of awesome albums) and then there is few months that will include proofreading, manufacturing, promo, press, radio, advertising and all the other shit that goes into releasing a record.

Who is Manny Sanchez, and what did he contribute?

Manny Sanchez is my boy and his contributions were invaluable. He is a great studio engineer and really helped us get the most out of this project. Manny and I work really well together and his studio experience has taught me a ton. It is not always common to find two engineers that thrive and feed off of each other while producing a record. Additionally, we did quite a lot of overdubs at Manny's new studio, the I.V. Lab. He has recently turned an old bank vault into a top notch recording facility. I would highly recommend it to anyone looking to record their band in the Chicagoland area. But all in all, this album would not sound as good as it does if were not for Manny Sanchez's contributions.

How different is the finished product - compared to what you envisioned before recording it?

We'll it's tough to say but maybe it's close? I don't know. Actually, originally we planned on doing a double album, one acoustic and one electric. The more we listened though we felt we had two good albums instead of one great album so we decided to condense.
That being said - don't worry folks, we have plans to get most of that additional material out there to you diehards in some shape or form.
We have discussed a B-sides type record with unreleased tunes and even some of the writing process.

When should we expect to see the Album?

'Safety in Numbers' will be available in stores everywhere this coming Spring.

By Brett Saul

Washington and Lee: Umphrey's Thwarts "No Fun Allowed" Philosophy

One of the best things about Umphrey's McGee is that no matter where you see them, you're pretty much guaranteed a great time. Shortly after moving from New Orleans to Richmond, I was thrilled to discover that a show was going to take place at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia on September 23. Not having seen the band since their epic throwdown at Tipitina's late-night during Jazzfest this spring, I was really excited at the prospect of this unexpected opportunity.

I had never been to Lexington before, though I had heard that the university was the type of place where "students drink scotch and wear pearls." Umphrey's was going to play to the Biff and Muffy crowd? Interesting.

So we drove the couple of hours to Lexington, arriving in time to see the campus cops busting up the nascent lot scene. Apparently drinking was not only prohibited in the building itself, but anywhere within a five-mile radius. Seriously. I have never been to a show where not only was there no bar at the venue, but no store or bar anywhere nearby to relax preshow or during setbreak. The venue was a giant metal warehouse that would have been perfect to absorb the unpleasant effects of mass partying. Then it turns out that the venue is strictly non-smoking. To enforce this policy, a force of about twenty rent-a-cops kept vigilant watch over the crowd of 200.

Staking out our spots in the front row, we watched the crowd slowly accumulate at the front of the gigantic warehouse. To my shock a very large contingent of attendees were guys in blazers, button-downs and ties; the girls were equipped with prom-style dresses. I chat with one such attired freshman and his stiletto-heeled date, "It's homecoming weekend," he explains.

Finally, enough people show up for the music to begin. It was an awesome show from start to finish, no need to go into too much detail, because let's face it, if you're reading this, you know all about how Umphrey's melts face. Unfortunately, a yellow wind-breaker clad student security guard stands grumpily in the center of the front row to my immediate left, blocking my view of Jake. The guy glares at everyone who looks remotely heady and seems determined in his efforts to refuse to enjoy the show. I retaliate by making him put up with my joyfully unselfconscious dancing and grooving. Occasionally I glance behind me out of curiosity to see if any of the pre-MBA crowd has loosened their ties or top buttons - they haven't.

The atmosphere at Washington and Lee was vastly different from any other Umphrey's show I've ever been to (particularly the freewheeling, super-lax Tipitina's), but one thing was consistent: the absolute rocking that took place [even if Pony had to sing Biz Markie to get Biff and Muffy to liven up].

By Lesley McCall

the second set, my friend came down and said we were leaving - I looked at him and laughed. I said "Go ahead and leave, I'll find my way." He was hesitant, but he left. How could I leave this show early? Then the show ended & I realized I was stranded, 30 miles from home. I sat on a bench trying to figure out how I was going to get back. Just then a couple I had met earlier asked me where I was going and it turned out they were going back the same way I was. I showed up at my buddy's doorstep and he couldn't believe that I had made it back. I had so many stories to tell him about that night and he couldn't believe that we had gone to the same show.

When I returned to my home in northern Illinois at the end of May, I told my wife all about the fun I had had in San Diego. When we made our way to Summer Fest, we had the time of our lives. We danced through the entire second set - I had never seen her dance like that. I am now determined to introduce my friends in Chicago to Umphrey's and I can only hope that they have as memorable a time as had during my first experience.

Erik Fries



Jake & Brendan
Irving Plaza - NYC
Photo by Eliot Jay Sherman

Counting It Down Umphrey's Style

A New Year's Fiestivas for the rest of us. Spreading holiday cheer to the Windy City for the past 5 years, this show-boatin' shindig features six of the more creatively rocktastic lads you'll find in the Midwest. Umphrey's McGee and Chi-Town have grown synonymous with ringing in the New Year much like the throngs flocking to a giant cup of noodles in the Big Apple. Celebrating the year that was and peeking into what the future holds, the fellows have grown so adept at toasting the night away that indulging in such an event warrants its own warning label: Contents Not Suitable for the Weak of Rock.

The frenzied fury of sonic delight unleashed on stage, coupled with a dazzling kaleidoscope of colors, transforms into a Bacchanalian bash. Seizing the opportunity to invite some music pals, bust out some new covers and carouse with some tomfoolery, the McGee men dial the amps to 11 and let it all hang out. The horns section, a near yearly staple, heralds the merry festivities like angels we've heard while high. Owing to the nostalgia of the season, it's hard not to get choked up over the last song of the year. And on its heels comes the first ode of the nascent annum, which, for the superstitious, foretells the fortunes of the year.

Debuting in the shadow of Wrigley Field amongst the hibernating baseball fans, the cozy confines of The Cubby Bear hosted the inaugural gig. Graduating from the bar scene, the group leap-frogged from one historic venue to another: Vic Theatre, Riviera Theatre, Aragon Ballroom. Playing in the comfort of their sweet home Chicago grants the boys license to push the ballot with their ingenuity and penchant for panache. Song selection yields a highlight reel of hits so consistently, you'd think Charlie Weis were writing the setlist. Creeping on you like a ghost of New Year's past, I powered up Mr. Peabody's Way Back Machine to offer a snapshot of the preceding half decade.

12.31.00 Cubby Bear, 1 Set
Ring Out/Ring In: Andy's Last Beer / Q*Bert

An exuberant and loose evening told the story of the first New Year's performance. Dance and groove numbers ideal for the occasion suitably packed the singular set. Fittingly, "2001: A Space Odyssey" played a recurring theme, while "Stomping Grounds" and "Cantina Band" leant to the joyous mood rung in by the funky jam out of "Andy's Last Beer." It's evident the band was working out the kinks when they enlisted the crowd's assistance with an unplugged cord to Budney's light show. Later, Brendan did his best to avoid a baby new year born in the venue. Grander shows loomed on the horizon after wetting their feet for the first time.

Umphrey's Gold 2005

As the year comes to an end, we find ourselves reflecting on that which has occurred in the past 360 some odd days. In the land of Umphrey's McGee, a lot can be said for those days. Now take the chance to flex your nerdom & pass on your opinion of what were the best moments of this past year. Through the magic of Umph Gold you can have your vote count. Send along your entries to umphgold@yahoo.com by January 31st, 2006. Enjoy:

1. Favorite Show (pick three)
2. Favorite set
3. MVP (favorite song)
4. Favorite New Song*
5. Most Improved Song
6. Favorite Instrumental
7. Best Jam Vehicle
8. Favorite "Jimmy Stewart" with Lyrics
9. Favorite Instrumental "Jimmy Stewart"
10. Favorite Run of Shows (3 or more)
11. Favorite Segue
12. Favorite Encore
13. Favorite Cover
14. Favorite Guest Appearance
15. Best Boring (stage banter)
16. Best Light Show
17. Favorite Indoor Venue
18. Favorite Outdoor Venue
19. Favorite Podcast

* "Atmosfarag", "Believe the Lie", "Got Your Milk (Right Here)", "Higgins" and "Passing"

12.31.01 Vic Theatre, 3 Sets
Ring Out/Ring In: Machine Gun / Nothing 2 Fancy

Something must've been in the eggnog because the group seemed overtly horny. Perhaps it was the desire to utilize the Vic's spacious environs to maximize the sax and trumpet's impact. Or maybe it was the wedding proposal that transpired four songs into the night. Whatever the case, the band fueled the vibe, debuting "Machine Gun" known best from its appearance in Boogie Nights and The Kinks "Ape Man," a nod to our primal instinct for revelry. By night's end, the ante was raised on topping this arousing affair.

12.30.02, 12.31.02 Vic Theatre, 5 Sets
Ring Out/Ring In: Glory / Miss Tinkle's Odyssey

Otherwise known as the Mike Mirro Farewell Run, the culmination of 2002 marked the end of the beloved drummer's chapter with UM. Things got rolling on the 30th when two members from moe. entered the fray for a jam before capping the set with the debut of "Cherub Rock." Bidding adieu to our favorite mop dancer in memorable fashion, the band orchestrated a passing of the torch moment as Mirro gave way to his replacement for a rendition of "Hurt Bird Bath." Following this poignant moment in Umphistory with another, the group treated all with an adaptation of Abbey Road side B. Two words: simply stunning. Oh, then they played another set and two encores.

12.29.03, 12.30.03, 12.31.03 Vic Theatre, 7 Sets
Ring Out/Ring In: Triple Wide / Wife Soup

A three night occupancy at the Vic marked Kris Myers' first official New Year's experience, spear-heading a full throttle fete unlike any other. A stellar show on the 29th, featuring an epic "Nothing Too Fancy" and jarringly powerful "Shine On You Crazy Diamond," whet the palate for ensuing shenanigans. Sporting The Store jerseys on the 30th and stealing a WWE plot line, a verbal spat between Joel and Kris prompted Myers to "quit" the band. The crowd immediately clamored for Mirro's return and Dr. Mike obliged, reprising 2002's drummer swap with another take on "Hurt Bird Bath." NYE saw the group decked in dapper suits as they brought an old school flavor to the evening with six Motown hits, calling the congregation to get downright dirty cutting a rug.

12.30.04, 12.31.04 Riviera Theatre, 5 Sets
Ring Out/Ring In: Bright Lights / Plunger

Electricity burst at The Riv's seams, from the waiting masses outside to the cameras roaming about inside. The circus was in town, literally, with side acts in between sets and breathtaking acrobats gyrating during songs. Buckethead and Mini-Kiss donned the opener roles admirably and later joined the band: one collaborating on an inspiring composition, the other joining in a whimsical dance along. Guess which was which? Still in a giving mood, Umphrey's won the crowd over with a bevy of first timers in "Ophelia," "Don't Do It," "Sledgehammer" and "Good Morning." And if that doesn't paint a big enough picture, the newly released DVD can fill in the blanks.

12.30.05, 12.31.05 Aragon Ballroom

Call it a hunch, but I think it'll be unforgettable.

By Jimmy Rogers



Jake Cinninger
In the Studio
Photo by Beth Saul