

Bela Fleck and The Flecktones: An unorthodox trio

By Ming Rodrigues

For the Oregon Daily Emerald

What prompts a New York City kid to take up the banjo? Hearing the Beverly Hillbillies theme song perhaps or the duelling-banjos scene in Deliverance? Well, ves. "I was just riveted by the sound of the instrument," admits Bela Fleck.

When he took up the instrument at age 15, rather than hewing to traditional forms Fleck delved into the kind of music other urban teenagers were playing: Led Zeppelin, Yes, and Chick Corea, for instance. Later, after moving to Nashville and earning a reputation as a bluegrass whiz, he eventually formed Bela Fleck & The Flecktones, a group that mirrors his wider interests in jazz, bluegrass, rock, funk, Latin and oth-

Since then, the unorthodox band (instruments include a unique electronic percussion called the Synth-Axe Drumitar) has made some impressive accomplishments. Each of their first two albums was nominated for a Grammy award, and their 1991 release, Flight Of The Cosmic Hippo, climbed to number one on Billboard's contemporary jazz charts. They have also appeared no less than three times on The Tonight Show, and in late 1991 they toured Europe with Bonnie Raitt and wrapped up the year in style

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when they opened the New Year's Eve show for the Grateful Dead.

Now comes UFO TOFU, the group's third studio release, and Bela Fleck is proud of it. "It's a real evolution," he says. "We wanted to continue the attitude of the first two albums and to combine complex playing with accessibility. This time we tried to be more song-oriented with memorable melodies, diverse grooves and new sounds."

"Our success surprises us," says Fleck. The band, however, attributes their popularity to a grueling schedule of over 200 dates per year for the last three years.

One way to understand the band's rise to stardom is to realize Bela Fleck and The Flecktones as musical visionaries. For Fleck, the opportunity to make changes in how the banjo was played began in New York when he was the young protege of banjo great Tony Trishka. Fleck said Trishka was open to all types of music, which he considered ideal while starting out on the instrument.

'No matter if it's jazz, bluegrass, Irish or world music, what I like to listen for is the spirit of creativity - it's a kind of 'forward leaning' quality you can always pick up. says Fleck. "It's all ethnic music, in a way. Jazz, for instance, is ethnic



Bela Fleck and The Flecktones appear with Artis the Spoonman and Baby Gramps at the Hilton Ballroom April 24.

music, but like Indian music, it's also becoming a kind of classical

"I think there's a lot of growth within the band as a performing

"We improvise together so much that a lot of the growth is what happens on stage in the way we take left turns together and make splitsecond decisions based on knowing what we each might do or might

"We're a very human-friendly group. With some bands, you can tell they're trying to push and be intense all the time while with others, it's obvious they're in it for the of these. We've played together long enough to read each other's minds and we love to challenge ourselves. but mainly we want to communi cate with the audience."

A live Flecktones concert is a departure from their structured. recorded efforts. Fleck provides a musical anchor while the Tones showcase their musical and physical dexterity on solos and duets. Their repertoire ranges from The Beatles to Tchaikovsky to Victor's rap tune for world peace.

Fleck says live is what the band is all about. "People always say 'We really like your records, but when we see you live, it's a whole differ-

"There's a lot of visual aspects to what's going on and there are things that you'll see when you come to see the Flecktones that you won't see anywhere else - people playing instruments in certain ways...listening to the music is only half of

Along with special guests Artis the Spoonman and Baby Gramps, Bela Fleck and The Flecktones will perform Saturday, April 24, at 9 p.m. in the Eugene Hilton Ballroom.

Tickets - \$10 for students and \$12 general admission - are available at the EMU Main Desk.

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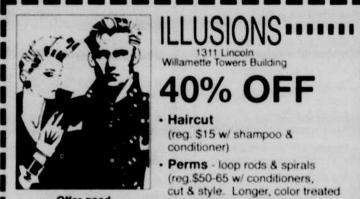
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Brave Old World upholds the musical tradition

By Ming Rodrigues

Sounding like a cross between a New Orleans dixieland band, an old-time Appalachian string band and a Brecht-Weill theater band, klezmer music is as rich as the East European Yiddish culture that gave it birth.

Full with the traditions of religious, folk and popular song, it reflects the influence of Romanian, Ukrainian, Polish, Russian, Hungarian, Greek and Turkish sensibilities on the Jewish imagination.

Carried by the great waves of Jewish immigration into the country at the turn

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of the century, it developed in the New World despite the near-destruction of Jewish life in the Old World. And so in love songs, wedding dances, historical ballads and political anthems, its melodies and rhythms continue to blend the flavor of East and West, of

Truly folk music, klezmer was a thread that, along with religious faith, kept a wandering people in communi-cation with one another.

Frequently compared with American jazz because of its improvisational style, klezmer also grew out of an oppressed, isolated subculture - a world for the most part unknown to the

Like African-American culture, the music of the klezmer bands preserved its integrity because of its isolation from the mainstream and thus, when it broke out of the underground, it appeared on the scene fresh, vibrant and fascinat-

A dozen years ago, first in the Bay Area and then throughout the nation, the Klezmorim ensemble dominated the klezmer scene. Lev Liberman's enthusiastic research had encouraged him to form an authentic klezmer band playing authentic klezmer music. Other bands followed worldwide, and soon the Klezmorim began expanding its

repertoire. However, though the spirit of the music remained, often its roots

One klezmer group that did not dilute its music to accommodate tastes more attuned to American pop, rock and jazz was Brave Old World, a fourpiece band including Michael Alpert on vocals, commentary, violin and per-cussion; Alan Bern on accordion, piano and percussion; Stuart Brotman on string bass, cimbalum, percussion and various instruments; and Joel Rubin on

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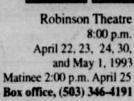


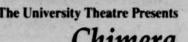




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