

Primus bassist's new CD experiments on frogs

■ Les Claypool has collected a strange group of talented musicians on this live set



CD REVIEW

Les Claypool 'Live Frogs—Set 1'

Reprise

★★★★☆

By Mason West
Oregon Daily Emerald

After more than a year away from releasing albums with his band Primus, Les Claypool brings his slap-bass licks back to the public ear with "Live Frogs—Set 1." As the title suggests, the CD is the first of two live recordings with Claypool's newest side project, "Colonel Les Claypool's Fearless Flying Frog Brigade."

Like Primus, or any of Claypool's other bands, the Frog Brigade isn't easily categorized in any musical genre. The instruments use many electronic effects and end up sounding like spacey waves of sound. Regardless of how the music ends up, Claypool always takes care to surround himself

with excellent musicians who share his experimental visions.

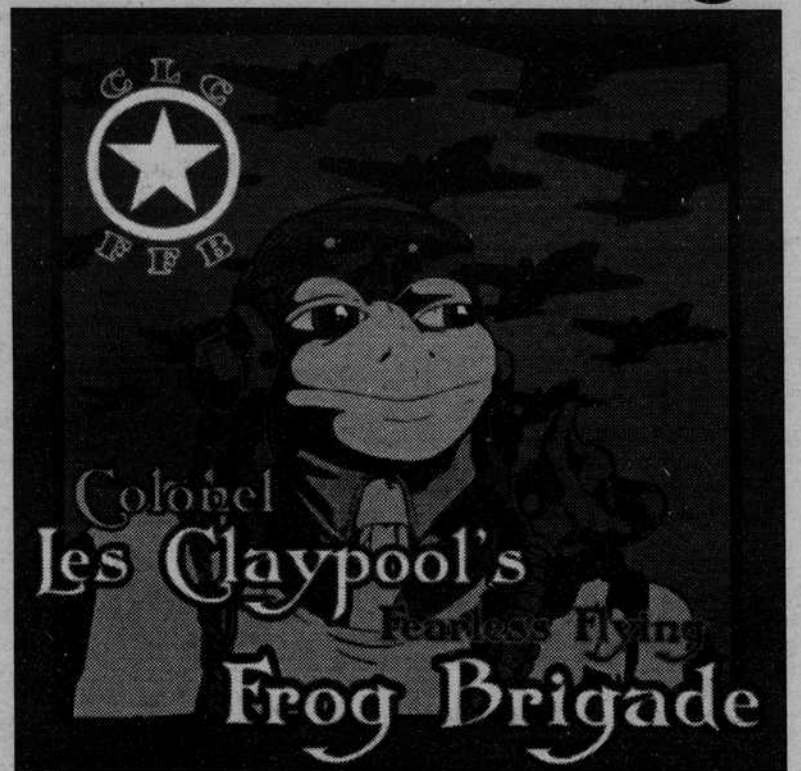
For this particular group, Claypool pooled original Primus guitarist Todd Huth, saxophonist Skerik, guitarist Eenor, drummer Jay Lane and keyboardist Jeff Chimenti. Eenor was the odd addition to the group, selected from a number of applicants responding to a want ad, as Claypool explains to the audience in an aside on the CD.

The dialogue that Claypool has with the audience helps to keep the live experience preserved in the recording. He isn't afraid to stop in the middle of a song to inform listeners about who will play the next solo. He also isn't afraid to lambaste his own band mate, Skerik, for going over their allotted time limit for solos. With a tone between admiration and disapproval, Claypool says, "You are a rebellious man."

While not rebellious, putting out a live CD is risky for any artist. There is no time when the actual quality of the musicians is as apparent as when they are out of the studio and on the stage. But Claypool's risk pays off big time: "Live Frogs—Set 1" displays his true instrumental skill and captures the pure essence of spontaneous creation.

While there is no way to know for sure, it seems very believable that at least half of the CD's 66 minutes were made up on the spot during the show. How else does one stretch seven songs to that length? Claypool's love of improvisation is what prompts him to create such eclectic gatherings of musicians and push his own style.

Now, the Claypool style is something that you either love or hate. The best way I can describe it is as very appealing noise. It is always upbeat, and at its best it is the closest thing to real musical innovation. But it sure is weird. The oddities created in Primus seem tame compared to the stuff Claypool comes up with his other groups. The opening track of the show is a cover called "Thela Hun Ginjeet," and the lyrics don't extend much beyond those words (if they count as words) being melodically screamed. All of the songs on the CD are covers, but most of them are from other Claypool projects. One might be inclined to ask if artists can cover themselves. I honestly don't know, but listeners should expect more of the same with the Frog Brigade's follow up release, "Live Frogs—Set Two," which will be the band covering the entire Pink Floyd album "An-



imals." That one is expected out this summer.

There are a number of things that are refreshing about this album. It is great to see that a man like Claypool is still experimenting with his music and not trying to please anyone other than himself. This album is being released on his own label, Prawn Song Records. It would likely never have seen print were it not for his recent deal with a branch of Sony record distribution.

But in all of Claypool's incarnations, there is something familiar

that will comfort fans of his work. This comfort stems from Claypool's own love of both the music he creates and the music others make. In mid-song on "Hendershot" he proclaims, "I really can't get over the beauty of it all, the beauty that is ... surf saxophone."

No matter how far out there Claypool goes with his music, he has the talent to back it up. He is certainly one of the most skilled bass guitarists in the popular-music arena and also one of the better entertainers who doesn't use pyrotechnics.

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April 8th at 2:00 p.m.
Knight Library, University of Oregon • Browsing Room
The UO Bookstore celebrates National Poetry month with readings by poets Kurt Brown and Peter Sears. Both these marvelous poets have had a widely felt influence on contemporary American poetry.

Arlene Stein
April 17th at 7:30 p.m.
Knight Library, University of Oregon • Browsing Room
Arlene Stein, Associate Professor of Sociology at the University, will premiere her new book, *The Stranger Next Door*. Focusing with razor sharp insight on the plight of a small Oregon town torn over the issue of individual rights, Arlene proves herself an able chronicler of our times.

Admission to Author Events is free and open to the general public.