

Giants: Band released its first kids' album to positive reviews in 2002

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"('No!') seemed like a very easy side project. We weren't at the risk of being redefined as a kids' act. We were so established as an adult act, we knew we weren't going to really confuse people," Flansburgh said. "The record we put out turned out to be wildly successful and that surprised everybody. We just didn't have the commercial aspirations for the album at all, but it really struck a chord with parents and kids. It's really been an entirely new audience."

But this new audience hasn't been left in the dark. In 2003, TMBG released a bedtime picture book titled "Bed, Bed, Bed," which was released with an accompanying CD. "Bed, Bed, Bed" contains four original songs, which were illustrated by Canadian artist Marcel Dzama for the book. Earlier this year, TMBG also released a DVD/CD titled "Here Come the ABCs," which has also found success with this new audience.

But TMBG never stopped dipping into other creative outlets. In 2002, TMBG won its first and only Grammy award for "Boss of Me," the theme song for Fox's "Malcolm in the Middle." This success was another surprise for TMBG.

"Like a lot of things we've done in our careers, we didn't really have any preconceived notion of how successful the show would be," Flansburgh explained. "And the show just took off. They had finished about four shows when the first episode went on the air and it was instantly Fox's number one show and that just added this whole level of pressure for everybody."

But while "Boss of Me" might be

TMBG's most well-known theme song, the band has also lent its musical brilliance to such shows as "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart," Disney shows and The Travel Channel's "Amazing Vacation Homes."

Although these creative projects have produced much success for TMBG, Flansburgh still sees himself as a guy just doing what he loves, regardless of whether people like it. Fortunately for him, people seem to like it.

"We don't really project much into what people think about us or what people know of us. ... We don't spend a lot of time and energy into trying to figure out how we connect with the world. We're really involved with this inward-looking, creative project and we welcome the world to check it out," he said. "We really respect individuals and individuality and we just want to be an original band. In some ways, we're more private than people realize. Our goals are personal and our interests are personal. Being a performer and being famous really doesn't motivate us. I think there's a general notion that if you're in a rock band, you're on an ego sled to the moon."

But for TMBG, egos aren't getting in the way of doing what the band loves to do: rocking out and enjoying every minute of it.

"We've been doing this for almost 25 years now, and it's a very common question that people ask, 'How come you've kept on doing it?' And it's never been hard," Flansburgh said. "It's always been a very interesting, satisfying, challenging project. I think we've done a good job in designing our dream project at the beginning and keeping



John Flansburgh, left, and John Linnell of They Might Be Giants celebrate their 2002 Grammy win for "Boss of Me."

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up with it has really been a pleasure."

The pleasure is continuing as TMBG gears up for yet another album to put under its already large belt. TMBG has also recently released a DVD/CD combo titled "Venue Songs," which Flansburgh described as an "unusual project ... unlike anything else." "Venue Songs," which contains original songs written for every venue that the band played in during a certain period of time, is only available at concerts or by visiting www.tmbg.com.

"We're working on the difficult 12th album but we're really just in the thick of the whole writing process right now. It's in the pre-production. For me and John, it's the big scary part. But definitely, we're making a new album that will be out sometime very soon," Flansburgh

said. "And this venue thing that just came out with a DVD and a CD — it's like a two disk set — it's a real special item. It's kind of our holiday gift for the front row."

Tickets can be purchased for \$20 from www.ticketwest.com. The show begins at 8 p.m. in Agate Hall, located on East 18th Avenue and Agate Street. And although

Flansburgh can't remember whether TMBG has been in Eugene before, he is definitely excited to rock out at this Saturday's concert.

"I really look forward to this show; it's going to be a gas," Flansburgh said. "Bring your crash helmet and we'll see you there."

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Comic: Show allows greater creativity

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and the satire and the points and all of those things, ultimately, have to come wrapped in a whole lot of jokes."

Since the launch of his cartoon strip, many media outlets have portrayed McGruder as a representative political voice for young black people. This is a classification he feels unprepared to take on. In fact, he said his audience often takes his work far too seriously. He'd rather let black political leaders, who he believes are lacking in numbers, take on the responsibility of true political dialogue.

"I think we're too quick to turn to entertainers to fill that void," he said. "It used to be we had politicized entertainers and then actual political leaders. We had both. So, James Brown could make a political song, but he wasn't a political leader and nobody mistook him as such."

Additional pressure has fallen on McGruder to create a show that will follow in the footsteps of "Chappelle's Show." However, this is a task he is more willing to take on,

and he believes "The Boondocks" will achieve audience expectations.

"What (Dave) Chappelle did was set a really high bar, but there's nothing wrong with that," McGruder said. "He did a great show, and I think people loved it for a reason. And that audience is out there now, and I think it should expect something of that same quality."

"The Boondocks," with its emphasis on race and pop culture, falls into the same category as "Chappelle's Show." Although this type of satire also exists in adult cartoons such as "The Simpsons," "King of the Hill" and "Family Guy," it is this unique hybrid of presentation and subject matter that McGruder believes will propel the show's success on Adult Swim.

In addition, a number of stars have signed on to bring vocal life to "The Boondocks" family. Regina King, known for her roles as Margie Hendricks in "Ray" and Marcee Tidwell in "Jerry Maguire," will voice Huey and Riley. John Witherspoon, who played father Willie Jones in the "Friday" film series, will voice Granddad. Cedric Yarbrough, who plays Deputy Jones

on Comedy Central's "Reno 911," will voice several supporting characters, and guest appearances will include hip hop artist Mos Def and Charlie Murphy from "Chappelle's Show," among others.

When asked how he will respond to criticism of the show, which has already raised some eyebrows with its abundant use of "the N-word," McGruder seemed unaffected. He said he doesn't need to be criticized in order to be motivated and instead tries to shut out audience input entirely. He is even-handed in his ignorance, disregarding fan mail and hate mail alike, and plans to take a similar approach with responses to the new series. He understands criticism and confusion of his work comes with the territory.

"When you decide to become a satirist, you're deciding to be misunderstood by a lot of people," he said, explaining that the only way to avoid that is to not make anything at all. "I'd hate not to create out of the fear of being misunderstood or misinterpreted. It's not worth it."

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