



## Spankin' Along

Acoustic band driven by doses of 'inspired lunacy.'

**T**he Asylum Street Spankers, an Austin, Texas-based band, took their name from the nickname of a street near the University of Texas campus that once boasted a row of state mental hospitals and added "spanker," slang for a musician who "can play an acoustic instrument both loud and well." This definition of musical proficiency fits well, as this musical bunch vowed long ago to never play with amplification.

The two original members, Christina Marrs and Wammo, met at a party at the Dabbs Hotel in Llano, Texas, in 1994. Marrs was there not to sing, as she does now, but to twirl her fire baton. The two became friends with Guy Forsyth and set out a plan for a

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band that celebrated the great musical traditions of the 20th century with no amplification. Marrs, just beginning her singing career, was asked to join in, and the Spankers were born.

The vision was for an acoustic band with weird instrumentation — Marrs plays musical saw, Wammo plays kazoo, sheets of steel, washboard. The ragtag bunch that makes up the Spankers take their musical cues from nearly all the genres that have made American music great over the last century: ragtime, blues, swing, country, bluegrass, Tin Pan Alley jazz. They eschew pigeonholing, preferring instead to call their vaudevillian approach "inspired lunacy." With nearly 10 years of touring and six albums to their credit they are going strong and show no signs of stopping.

The Spankers are touring to support the release of their latest CD, *My Favorite Record*, and gearing up for their next. I spoke with Marrs by phone recently, and found out a little more about them. There's at least a little humor in everything they do, and the title of the CD is no exception. "If a DJ plays a song, they have to say 'That was the Asylum Street Spankers from *My Favorite Record*,' so it's kind of a gag," reveals Marrs.

As far as why they incorporate so many different musical traditions, Marrs says with so much great music to choose from, why be passionate about only one type? "I guess we just like so many different types of music. We're not focused on just one passion. We've never been afraid to try a song just because it was this genre or that genre or this era or that era. We do have so many musical influences. We like having the variety and I think it keeps it interesting."

The Spankers imbue most of their songs with an earthy humor, singing about sex and drugs, beer and scrotums. The musicians you see listed on the CD will probably not be the musicians you see on stage. "The nature of the Spankers is kind of a revolving tour thing.

Wammo and I have been around from the very beginning. Stanley Smith has been around almost from the very beginning. Guy Forsyth was a founding member who quit about three-and-a-half years later and still plays local gigs with us. He's always a strong presence on our records. But this band is under a constant transformation," explains Marrs.

The ASS have already mastered their next CD, which is slated for a February release. The CD was recorded live to two track and features mostly covers that have been in the band's repertoire for some time but which didn't fit in on past CDs. Uncharacteristically, a lot of the songs on this upcoming CD are newer, such as the Beastie Boys "Paul Revere," and Black Flag's "TV Party." Yet, they also reach all the way back to 1898 for the track "Some of These Days." "Sugar In My Bowl" was on the Spankers' first album which is now out of print. The song has remained an audience favorite, and this was a great opportunity to revisit this wonderful, sexy song. *My Favorite Record* is a fun and musically diverse recording, and the Spankers have a wealth of raucous and risqué back material. Get a dose of it Thursday, Aug. 14 at Sam Bond's. **EW**

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