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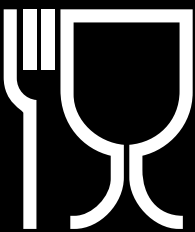
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music BY VANESSA SALVIA



Umphrey's McGee, Iration
8:30 pm Friday, Oct. 23
McDonald Theatre
\$17.50 adv., \$20 door

Who Are Umphrey's McGee?

The band embraces fans and improvisation

After digging around online to find out more about Umphrey's McGee, I couldn't find a reliable answer to the question: What does the name mean? — is it really the guitarist's cousin's real name? Does he spell his first name with an apostrophe? — but I did discover a lot more about Umphrey's McGee.

In 2004, *Rolling Stone* magazine declared the South Bend, Ind., band the "odds-on favorites in the next Phish sweepstakes." The band's most recent studio album, *Mantis*, was released in January 2009; it is the first Umphrey's album to consist entirely of material never previously performed at shows. Most people, at least people like me who don't know much about them, think of them as a jam band. Though they do jam, it's strongly improvisation based.

In fact, the band uses an arsenal of hand signals and body language to communicate musical ideas during their live improvisations. These random musical suggestions become riffs that take flight. *Mantis* was similarly formed; band members presented each other with CDs containing hundreds of riffs that

had been lying in wait, unused, for a dozen years. The cream of the crop of these riffs were "displaced, modulated, and shifted about like Lego blocks," a press release says, "growing from rough drafts into the elegant and emotionally fulfilling tracks on *Mantis*."

The band encourages fan-led interaction by enhancing their recorded content with downloadable bonus material such as demos, live tracks, alternate takes and videos — the more pre-orders the band receives, the more bonus content the fans get. They've taken that aesthetic even further by launching the Stew Art Series, or S², which allows audience members to "conduct" the band's live improvisations. S² events precede an already-scheduled night's show as a discrete event. Audience members can text their ideas to the band's mobile interface. The sound man filters the suggestions, then projects them on a screen for the band to incorporate. Each custom S² ticket entitles the ticketholder to an autographed CD of the night's music. Though the Eugene show won't be an S² event, the following night's show in Portland will. **EW**

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