

Mp3 Spoonfed Tribe - The Legend Of Supamonkey - A Journey Beyond The Besides



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Ingredients: massive percussion, vibes, flutes, guitars, a ten gallon can, xylaphone, bass, 1/10 of 1 sequencing, piano, (may contain one or more of the following; triangle, woodblock, cowbell, gong, chimes), marimba, toning bowls, spoken word. 14 MP3 Songs WORLD: World Fusion, ROCK: Jam-band

Details: FW Weekly Feature: Wednesday, July 06, 2005 A Smile for the World In a grimmer time, Spoonfed Tribe still serves up a Summer of Love message with rocking psychedelic music. By ANTHONY MARIANI Photos by Vishal Malhotra Doing what their collective heart tells them: Spoonfed Tribe Egg Nebula: 'If you can push things in the right direction with music, there is no wrong.' Kaboom: 'Basically, we want to sound like everybody.' ShoNuff is the band's quiet leader. Jerome 57: 'We'd seen so many bands that were so rehearsed. We felt fraudulent if we played the same two songs two gigs in a row.' They were somewhere in Colorado, between Fort Collins and Steamboat Springs, barreling down the road in the tour bus - an actual, full-sized school bus they had painted white - when the brakes went out. The guys in Spoonfed Tribe had seen trouble before. Despite the lack of a major label contract, the jam band had been together in one form or another for nearly 12 years and - in the spirit of the Grateful Dead, Phish, and other successful jam bands - had traveled thousands of miles across the country to play shows. Equipment trailers have been particularly temperamental. There was the one that snapped loose on the way to Austin. "I was driving," recalled Gouffahttz, one of two Spoonfed drummers. "And I looked in the rear view mirror. ... I said, 'Uh, guys. The trailer's gone.'" A glance out the nearest window showed the trailer traveling beside them, magically avoiding obstacles, such as trees and road signs (and the bus), with the grace of a drunken cow. Losing steam by the second, the mobile storage unit soon landed awkwardly but comfortably in a roadside ditch. Then there was the trailer that broke free on a highway in

Baton Rouge, jumped the median like a getaway car driven by a crazed fugitive, crossed oncoming traffic, and crashed on the side of the road. "The police blocked traffic both ways for hours to let us get [the trailer]," said bass player Jerome 57. "Then they escorted us to the show. They had a couple drinks with us, too." But none of the band members was prepared for contemplating the great hereafter at 70 miles per hour in a large tin can in rural Colorado. Gouffahttz said he was sleeping in the back when he heard frontman Egg Nebula, who was driving, tell everyone the brakes weren't working. "There was a seriousness in his voice," Gouffahttz said. "I could feel the bus speeding up." A moment earlier, according to Nebula, he and the boys had merrily passed a side-of-the-road emergency pull-off. "When I was driving by, I thought, 'Man, that's cool for somebody who needs it,'" he said. A buzzer indicating low air in the brakes blared throughout the cabin. Coming up fast was a turn. "We could see it," said co-drummer Kaboom. "On the other side was about a hundred-foot drop." Driver Nebula noticed a slightly inclining entrance to a parking lot on the other side of the road. He swung the bus across the double yellow lines, hoping gravity would do its thing. The crew held tight. Wheels screeched. The trick worked, and after what felt like 10 minutes of pure anxiety, everybody on board exhaled. Gouffahttz ran outside and kissed the ground. Steam wafted from the tires. "That club we played that night, there were only about 20 people there," said Jerome 57. "But we played the shit out of it." They call it "The Bubble," the sense that everything is cool, even when it doesn't seem to be. The Bubble, Spoonfed members believe, is what has kept them together for an incredible amount of time for a band without major label support - and saved them from a few traffic fatalities. The Bubble is also what has continued feeding their popularity and what they say is going to make their forthcoming foray into the eastern United States a success. California? Been there; done that. Texas? Heck, yes - the Spoonfed guys are all from here. New York City? Maybe next year. But the Carolinas, Virginias, and environs? Said manager Theron Rodriguez: "From California to Texas to the East Coast, we're gonna make a big smile across the country." Though Spoonfed members might chafe at the thought, their unspoken yet understood goal is to reach progressively more people - not to sell c.d.'s but to spread the Spoonfed gospel of universal-mindedness. "If you can push things in the right direction with music," said Nebula, "there is no wrong." The Tribe's positive proselytizing takes the form of rock-based music built primarily from several sonic components, each suggesting otherworldliness: heavy, tribal rhythms from Gouffahttz, Kaboom, and Jerome 57; the type of cosmic mysticism that materializes in the earthy tones of Middle-Eastern ululations and Native American

chants; and the poetic tableaux created by ShoNuff's alternately bouncy and jagged guitar, Nebula's flute, and the assuredly positivist lyrics. From "Old Policy": "If you look into my heart / Same size as my fist / I hit you with the love / 'Cause the love never miss." From "Vacation": "Blend, reorchestrate, experience, collaborate / Unity forever first / Flowing light now shines diverse." From "Boo Radley Mentality": "Hey, kid / Teddy bear in hand, jammies saggin' / Time to be the man / Nose, snotty - finger-pick it clean / Wake up / Time to crown the bee the king / Now it's time to spread your wings." Nearly every song is informed by a sense of abandon, of "carpe diem." The music becomes more dynamic and robust in live settings, where the transcendentalist vibe is augmented by a trippy-dippy light show and the sight of the musicians in their wacked-out clothing jostling for elbow room onstage with dancers, a.k.a. "vibe enhancers." The Tribe's ability to expand the collective consciousness could be seen as vital in a world that grows crueler and colder by the minute, and while music with transportive and therapeutic qualities like the Tribe's hasn't steadily rung throughout Texas in decades, the style has deep roots here. Jam bands are direct descendants of the psychedelic bands of the 1960s, many of which were prominent in Texas when the style was in its nascence. Texas acts such as The Red Krayola, the Moving Sidewalks, and the first band reportedly to call its music "psychedelic," Roky Erickson's 13th Floor Elevators, were all at the forefront of the movement that eventually spawned the Grateful Dead, Country Joe McDonald and the Fish, and other Woodstock darlings. Psychedelic music became less popular and, in retrospect, more ludicrous-sounding (and looking) as the Summer of Love slowly wilted and gritty realism, with its punk guitars and black-hearted confessional lyrics, crept in. Though psychedelia's DNA of groovy guitars, spaced-out keyb's, and lyrics about the zodiac are as anachronistic as Olde English, a lot of contemporary bands - equipped with modern-day attitude and state-of-the-art instrumentation - have picked up on psychedelic musicians' belief that music can serve as a conduit to extra-sensory experience. Before Phish broke up last year, they were for years the hottest ticket in the country. A few neo-psychedelic bands call Texas home, such as ST 37, King's X, and Primordial Undermind, but none are as beloved or well endowed with street cred (read: not dorky) as Spoonfed Tribe. In addition to having strong musical chops, the members of Spoonfed Tribe are all athletic-looking, charismatic, and genuine. The quiet leader is ShoNuff, a self-taught guitar wiz who also breathes fire - literally. As a Samoan, he has been trained in acrobatic performance. Even though he's the oldest, ShoNuff is the "youngest at heart," according to Jerome 57. The son of the legendary North Texas musician Phil Bristow, Jerome 57

began musical training at an early age; he received his first piano when he was 10. His taste for less-popular music is matched by Nebula, a natural multi-instrumentalist who serves as the band's patriarchal figure. The bash brothers, Kaboom and Gouffahttz, complement each other - Kaboom is the strong, silent type, while Gouffahttz wears the attitude of an international man of leisure. All of the Tribe musicians are self-proclaimed record geeks, staunchly low maintenance (likely a byproduct of their blue-collar upbringings), and appreciative of the pedestal they've been placed on, as purveyors of positivity - even though they'd rather lead by example than by words. Jerome 57 said the band's message is "Do what your heart tells you," exactly as he and his bandmates do. Like any other important band, Spoonfed Tribe achieved its unusual signature sound by doing a lot of fine-tuning. The band's first recording (Spoonfed Tribe), a collection of studio outings lumped onto a single disc and released in 1999, is mostly derivative, the audio equivalent of a child secretly prancing around in his older brother's tie-dyed leather Starter jacket. A recurring theme is the Red Hot Chili Peppers' R&B-inflected radio-rock. Mildly innovative at the time, the Peppers' plastic soufflé of rapped lyrics, faux-funky bass lines, and the stringy, staccato clang of a rapidly strummed Strat has long since collapsed. Another dominant thread on the album is the theme song to the reality tv show Survivor. The sunny illusion of a windswept soundscape that close listening reveals to be propped up by synthetic atmospherics and choppy flute riffs leaves a huge, gooey smudge on the disc. There were positive aspects to Spoonfed, though, and they were nurtured on the following full-length, Ulikdiseeageough. The most notable was the band's ability to make bona fide music out of wildly pounded drums. Similar to the way in which jam bands like Phish, moe., and Widespread Panic had taken the concept of the seemingly never-ending, noodling guitar solo and made it the centerpiece of any great jam-band performance, the Tribe has elevated the concept of the drum solo to equally stratospheric heights. Parts of Ulikdiseeageough also neatly reflect the band's novel capacity for fomenting peaceful transcendence via surging waves of volume. Thick beats come on rapid-fire, and percussive strumming transforms inherently mild-mannered acoustic guitars into monsters. At the end of every bar, a cymbal swells louder and louder until it crashes, bringing the music to halt momentarily - but only for a moment. The intensity resumes a heartbeat later. The fine line between expressionist and accessible music played a large role in the creation of the band's most recent full-length, 2003's We Are Part of the Problem. The Tribe, according to bass player Jerome 57, paid close attention to the line during recording. The result: A solid, well-produced disc that bands half Spoonfed's age would kill to ascribe their

names to but that's more reflective of Spoonfed's cold, technical virtuosity than the band's soul. Imagine a musical gumbo with too many ingredients - rock, reggae, dub, folk, heavy metal, New Age. The wealth of styles makes the c.d. sound not like the handiwork of a single band but a compilation of many. During the recording of the disc, one of the Tribe members began asserting himself as a force. Daniel Katsuk had initially joined years earlier as a "vibe enhancer." Then he began playing guitar. Then singing - he hadn't discovered the potency of his voice until the day he heard Egg Nebula and Jerome 57 humming a melody and began to harmonize with them. Most of the Katsuk-driven tracks on *We Are Part of the Problem* are catchy and, oddly, poppish. His mellifluous contributions are counterpoints to the rest of the band's prototypical Spoonfed offerings, forceful workouts packed with punch but deliberately short on what Count Basie would call swing. *We Are Part of the Problem*, produced by the legendary eccentric Jon Congleton (the pAper chAse, The Roots), still generated a lot of attention. But Katsuk had been developing a band on the side, A-Hummin' Acoustical Acupuncture, and not long after the release of the c.d. he began hinting at possibly decamping. He and the band finally parted ways several months ago. The split was amicable. Two weeks ago, toward the end of a Spoonfed show at Ridglea Theater, Katsuk jumped onstage and accompanied his former bandmates in a percussion-laden free-for-all. "Just like old times," he said a few days later. Katsuk's presence in Spoonfed was palliative. Instead of replacing him ("You can't replace [Katsuk]," Jerome 57 said) or trying to channel his honey-sweet songwriting skills, the Tribe began sharpening its edges. At the Ridglea show, the band looked meaner. Dim lighting reduced the musicians to mere silhouettes at the foot of an enormous projection screen on which swirling, multi-colored shapes chased themselves. The sound was also more in-your-face, sharper, and less likely to have been easily reined in. The guitars snapped, growled, and at times neatly splintered into hundreds of bright, rusty shards; the drums popped and thundered; and Nebula's fleet flute made dramatic incisions in the dark, rich impasto. The heaviness threw into relief the spells of lightheartedness, like when Katsuk took the stage, making for an Experience-with-a-capital-E. Spoonfed Tribe had managed to bottle life - its highs and lows - and pour it over the crowd. To the average ear, the type of jam band music that Spoonfed Tribe produces probably sounds more energetic, more full-bodied, and simply better in a live setting. Phish, Widespread Panic, moe., the Dead - each demands to be heard live. Piping one of Jerry Garcia's extended guitar solos through tiny car speakers is nigh onto sacrilege. When he was alive, no c.d. could compare to the sight and sound of the chief Deadhead in person, his eyes closed, his gray hair

blowing in the wind, plucking his trademarked bubbly compositions note by note as if he were twisting multi-colored roses out of the empty air with his fingers. To be able to fully appreciate a jam band's music, you must experience it. Consequently, most jam bands do not sell a lot of records but instead make money by touring, touring, touring. There are dozens of festivals devoted to the genre. A few of the bigger ones - including High Sierra, Dreamtime, and Earth Awakens - and the jam band-friendly Lollapalooza have featured Spoonfed Tribe. Band members estimate that they've probably played in front of festival crowds as large as 10,000. Tribe members believe they wouldn't have been able to breach the festival circuit - and raise their national profile - if they hadn't made the risky decision a few months ago to commit to the band 100 percent. Not having side jobs freed them up to practice, grow, and - yes - tour, tour, tour. Said frontman Egg Nebula: "If you don't approach the band like it's the only thing in the world, you're gonna be disappointed." Up until the big decision, Spoonfed Tribe seemed like just another talented but under-appreciated local outfit whose time might have passed. The earliest incarnation of Spoonfed Tribe, according to Jerome 57, sounded a lot like Jane's Addiction, the psycho-grunge group from the early 1990s led by outrageous frontman Perry Farrell. The original Tribe included Jerome 57, ShoNuff, and Kaboom. Nearly all of the band's gigs were local, in places like Trees, Mad Hatters, and the Engine Room, and since - for whatever reason - people in the mid-1990s frequently attended shows en masse, the Tribe thrived. The scene teemed with bands overly influenced by local heavy-hitters like Drowning Pool and the Toadies. "We didn't want to sound like everyone else," said Jerome 57. "We wanted to create something that stands up to the ear." Spoonfed Tribe's virtually uncategorizable sound today is probably the result of the band members' refusal to jump on the Drowning Pool-Toadies bandwagon. The Tribe almost seemed predestined to concoct a unique identity. Each musician claims an array of influences, from Pink Floyd to Ween to King Crimson to Mr. Bungle, which may explain the honesty in Spoonfed's musical quotations. "Basically," said Kaboom. "We wanted to sound like everybody." The Tribe rehearsed in an Arlington warehouse that had been divided into a bunch of small rehearsal spaces, most regularly occupied by local bands. "We took a lot of drugs," recalled Jerome 57. "And we did a lot of musical experimenting." Spoonfed's original lead singer had a habit of skipping practice, while Basillicus Sam - the band that rehearsed next door - often flaked out on its lead singer, the person who would become Egg Nebula. "I remember waiting for practice, and I could hear [Spoonfed Tribe] though the walls," Nebula recalled. "One day, I was all by myself, and I just started humming melodies along to the

music." As scenesters, Nebula and the guys in the Tribe were cordial with each other, and Nebula had known Kaboom from junior high school. When time came for Spoonfed to hire a new lead singer, the choice was obvious. Their first show as the new and improved Spoonfed Tribe was at Texas Billiards, a metal club in Arlington that may or may not have had a pool table. Though they pretty much just cranked up and churned out a bunch of noise, the Tribe with Nebula impressed a few people. "After the show, people were like, 'Man, We're happy you guys got a new lead singer,'" said Jerome 57. The band's gigs began to balloon. As the crowds grew, according to Nebula, he and his bandmates began to notice a peculiar sort of energy between themselves and audiences. "We realized we didn't just wanna get up there and play songs," said Nebula. "[Live performance is] an exchange between audience and band. We wanted to feed that." Nebula said his sense of responsibility to audiences stemmed from his musical influences. "I discovered at an early age what music can do," he said. "The Beatles and a little LSD brought me to that spot. ... Don't get me wrong: There are good, short pop songs. But to me, it's more nurturing to get something like our music out and let somebody recognize it and give it back." The Tribe, Nebula said, began to "trim the fat" from performances, getting rid of parts that fell flat and emphasizing ones that killed. "We weren't trying to cater to crowds," he said. "But you find what works for you." All the while, the band had been laying down music in the studio. When they had enough random songs to fill a full-length, Spoonfed Tribe was put together. Its release "wasn't an event," said Jerome 57. "People were happy just to get something." One track, "Boo Radley Mentality" - the first song in whose composition Nebula played a lead role - started receiving airplay on the now-defunct rock station The Eagle (KEGL/97.1-FM). Spoonfed concerts started to evolve into happenings. Stoned fans arrived in ka-razy, Day-Glo-colored, hippie-dippie gypsy duds, and the theatrical dimension of the Tribe's shows began to mature. "We'd seen so many bands that were so rehearsed," said Jerome 57. "We felt fraudulent if we played the same two songs two gigs in a row." Ulikdiseegeough was released less than a year later. "That's when we said, 'Let's get outta town,'" said Jerome 57. Their first gig outside the Metroplex was in Wichita Falls. The Tribe members said they played well - just not the right stuff. "After we left, the club was like, 'You guys are great. Please don't come back,'" said Jerome 57. "'We need ZZ Top cover bands.'" At some point early in the band's upward trajectory, sound engineer and former club manager Rodriguez stepped into a supervisory role. He just couldn't help himself. "I swore I'd never manage a band," he said recently, defeated but glad. Rodriguez had assumed the lead in assembling the tiny

administration team (Big Toe, Greg Brown, Tommy Dowdy, Peanut, and Scott Ward) that currently helps keep the Spoonfed machine running. The manager was also instrumental in the construction of Say What You Want Records, the company under which Spoonfed Tribe does grown-up stuff, like pay bills and buy equipment. Non-musician life couldn't compare to rock-star living, especially for Jerome 57. "The '57' stands for the number of jobs I've had," he said, before recalling his most recent unceremonious termination, from part-time work at Central Market for eating a bell pepper that he accidentally hadn't paid for. With the release of every subsequent c.d. - including one half of the largely instrumental, meditative two-disc project called The Legend of Supermonkey - crowds mushroomed along with the Tribe's rep. Nearly every review of Spoonfed's festival performances overflows with praise. Clubs from the cities in which some of the festivals took place (Phoenix, San Francisco, Las Vegas) clamored to host Spoonfed shows. As the buzz continued to increase, the band could no longer avoid the decision: Either maintain the status quo or commit full-time to the Tribe and take a shot at the Big Time. Making Spoonfed priority No. 1 among the musicians and crew, according to Jerome 57, was a "no-brainer." Everyone seems pleased with the outcome. The musos said they've already achieved the ultimate, supporting themselves by making music. Any fortune in the future, they said, is (wavy) gravy. Throughout their career, the Spoonfed Tribe guys have followed a relatively predictable schedule of tour, tour, tour, then return home and record. This year is no different. When they come back from stretching a smile across the country's face in August, they plan on going into the studio. Where and with what producer are to be answered later. "We don't want anyone telling us what to do," said Jerome 57. "Like Ween, we'll do what we want." The Tribe is interested in shopping the disc around for a label deal, but Egg Nebula said, "I've got a lot of friends in bands that got signed and got burned." There is another option. Said Jerome 57: "We wanna carve a niche so deep that we get contacted by record labels." The Legend of Supermonkey has been given a facelift, renamed The Legend of Supermonkey - A Journey Beyond Besides, and is slated to be available by late summer. At around the same time, a live recording of the Ridglea show will also be released. "It's been a tough road, not having major label support," Nebula said, adding that most of the money the band makes goes right back into the creative process. Said Jerome 57: "The shows, the records - it's all done on a blue-collar budget." Spoonfed Tribe manages to do OK financially. Over the past few months, the band has hired an international booking agent from Atlanta, an entertainment lawyer from Nashville, and an international publicity company from New Orleans. The Tribe has also given up

rehearsing in rent-a-sheds to take up residence on a laid-out parcel of secluded real estate somewhere between Arlington and Kennedale. Best of all and just in time for the tour, the band owns a brand-spankin' new van. Copyright 2005 FW Weekly. 1204-B W Seventh St Ste 201 - Fort Worth, Texas 76102 Phone: (817) 321-9700 - Fax: (817) 335-9575 - Email Contact Web Publishing system by Echoes Media, Inc.

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