

# They Might Be Giants Returns to Ritz With New Album, Members

BY MITCH BENNETT  
ASSISTANT ARTS/DIVERSIONS EDITOR

When They Might Be Giants hit the Ritz Sunday they'll be jamming with a band rather than the drum machine of tours past. The group's fifth full-length release and full band debut, *John Henry*, has a fuller sound and some of the best crafted songs of TMBG's history.

With John Linnell on accordion and sax and John Flansburgh on guitar, the duo has built a solid repertoire of songs with clever lyrics and original vocal style. The new band consists of both Johns, plus bassist Tony Maimone (Pere Ubu, Bob Mould), drummer Brian Doherty (the Silos, Freedy Johnston, XTC), Tim Newman on trombone and Jim O'Connor on trumpet. We recently spoke with John Linnell.

**How did you select the musicians for the new band?**

JL: We kind of went through a very slow filtration process where we began with the idea of just hiring Kurt Hoffman (Ordinaires) to join us on stage to play sax and gradually we came around to the idea of getting a band. We had guys come in and we tried them out in lots of different combinations. Eventually we settled on Tony Maimone, who was somebody we already knew. I think that was a big part of it—Tony was a guy that we knew in our neighborhood and was the guy that we felt like we wanted to play with. And since then we got a drummer, a friend of a friend. We've really come to understand the importance of personality compatibility with the band as we've gone along. The thing is, we have enough money to hire people who are good—the real difficulty is finding people that we like.

**Have you decided on a name for the band yet?**

JL: Mmm... we're just calling it They Might Be Giants.

**Is Pere Ubu pissed that you "stole" Tony Maimone?**

JL: Well, that was Tony's decision. I think he felt like he had done his term with Pere Ubu. He played with them for something like 17 years. They eventually got another bass player, so I think the vibes are still good. Last year we did a bunch of



John Flansburgh, Brian Doherty, John Linnell and Tony Maimone make up TMBG's new lineup. Call their Dial-A-Song (718-387-6962) to hear new stuff.

shows with Pere Ubu, and for a couple of shows we had David Thomas (Pere Ubu's frontman) come up on stage, so it was pretty friendly.

**Who are those kids on the John Henry album and "Back to Skull" maxi-single?**

JL: Those are professional kids. We hired them. Most of them are show-business kids who have show-business parents who are trying to make careers for their kids. They're trying to market their, you know, cuteness or their kidness or something. And then some of them are people that we know. The youngest girl in the picture is the daughter of Glenn Marrow, who runs Bar-None Records.

**Are fans wasting their time trying to figure out if they should worry about the song "The End of the Tour" on John Henry?**

JL: Yeah, it's not about us. We're continuing to tour, as is evidenced by the fact that we're still out there plugging away. We don't really write autobiographically.

**Do you have any set plans for TMBG?**

JL: We have the following plans, which don't really constitute a solid plan for the future, but we want to put out a compilation album of all the B-sides we've done for

always had a great sense of humor and his favorite material of ours was the most oddball stuff. So I think he really contributed his own spirit to the one that existed. He was into experimentation. When we first got into MIDI, we left Bill alone in the studio mixing "Piece of Dirt." When we came back he had replaced every single drum sound with a kind of different, completely weird sounding drum. Little triangles and clicking sounds and stuff. It turned out that when he really cut loose in the studio, he came up with some of the most interesting stuff.

**A girl said she'd give me five bucks if I asked you if you like gladiator movies.**

JL: Wow. Did she say I have to answer? I don't think so, but I'll split it with you if you do...

JL: I kind of like "Ben Hur." I sort of like those movies; I happen to know that John hates those movies. When he sees Victor Machura wearing a toga he gets really depressed.

**Do you and John spend much time together aside from music?**

JL: Yeah, occasionally. We've had only a certain amount of free time recently, but, uh, what was the last thing John and I did together? We've mostly been working. John came over recently and we looked at pictures.

**What is the relationship between TMBG and Frank Black?**

JL: We've known him for a long time; we played with the Pixies before either of our bands had gotten any sort of notoriety. It's one of those things where you end up playing with a lot of bands that are at a similar level. Since then we've toured a whole bunch with Frank Black. We did a tour opening for his band in France last year and then we had him opening up for us solo in the United States in the fall. And I played on his first record and John has directed some of his videos, so we've done a lot of work together.

**How about the Meat Puppets?**

JL: We had Kurt Kirkwood design one of our shirts for us and we also sang on a Meat Puppets recording last year. They did a cover version of a song called "A White Sport Shirt and a Pink Carnation,"

and John and I sang backup vocals. But that seems to have been a promotional record for radio and I don't know what's happened to that recording.

**Will there be more songs about the Hotel Detective?**

JL: I don't know—we got such a muted response from the second song (on the "Back to Skull" CD single, 1994)—most people seemed to think it was a cover of the first song (on *They Might Be Giants*, 1986). Sometimes I think the only person who liked that song was Flansburgh. I basically made a demo at home and I played it for him and he was really excited about it. Then we recorded it and even some of our friends were not particularly... interested in it. (Laughing) So, I don't know if I should get discouraged or not.

**I liked it.**

JL: Thanks.

**Is she someone you know?**

JL: No, no, just an imaginary, fictitious character.

**How do you and Flansburgh write songs?**

JL: We each write individually, generally, but we've had a couple of occasions to collaborate. On this record, one of the things we did was that John wrote sets of lyrics. I actually asked him to give me ten song titles and instead he wrote ten sets of lyrics and handed them off. So I worked on a couple of them; I came up with "Subliminal"—that was his lyric and I wrote the music, and I wrote another song called "Dark and Metric" which hasn't been released yet but will come out eventually. We've also collaborated in the past. I wrote music for a song with no words—pretty much music without even a melody on top, and I gave that to John who wrote "My Evil Twin" based on that. "Put Your Hand Inside the Puppet Head" was the first example of that. I basically wrote the music and the chorus and he wrote the rest of it.

**Are you available?**

JL: Nope. I have a significant other.

**And Flansburgh?**

JL: Same answer. Sorry.

**You can't touch, but you can still watch They Might Be Giants this Sunday at the Ritz in Durham. Tickets are available at CD Exchange and School Kids in Chapel Hill. The Cat's Cradle show is canceled. Tickets are \$12.50 in advance.**



## R & B BRIEFS

BY SHARINA WILLIAMS  
STAFF WRITER

### TLC *CrazySexyCool* (LaFace Records) B+

Coming off of their double platinum debut LP, *Oooooohhh... On the TLC Tip*, T-Boz, Left Eye and Chilli, true women of the '90s, are blowing up the R&B charts with the first release from their new album, *CrazySexyCool*, entitled "Creep," about what you guys force us women to do when you don't act right. Although they have shed their hardcore, B-boy, condom-wearing image, TLC's "I ain't one to be questioned... Don't take no mess from nobody" attitude is still intact as relayed on the track "Switch," produced by one of hip-hop's finest young talents, Jermaine Dupri (also known for his success with Da Brat and Kriss Kross). *CrazySexyCool*, a combination of the group's personalities, is much more mature and balanced than their first effort, giving more of a laid-back "I'm in control" feel from T-Boz and Chilli without losing any of Left Eye's energy, thanks to executive producers Dallas Austin, Antonio "L.A." Reid and Kenneth "Babyface" Edmonds.

The trio produces a nice mixture of styles ranging from giving props to "His Purple Badness," now the artist formerly known as Prince, on the remake cut "If I Was Your Girlfriend," to getting a little hip-hop back-up from rap artists Phife of A Tribe Called Quest on "Intro-lude" and Dre of the group Outkast on "Sumthin' Wicked This Way Comes." On the flip side, though—enough worrying about backstabbing "friends." The track "Case of the Fake People" could have definitely been kicked to the curb with no tears shed. It sounds like a bad attempt to recreate their success on "What About Your Friends."

Besides "Creep," one of my personal favorites on the LP is "Red Light Special," where there is an even blend between T-Boz's brassy vocals and Chilli's R&B style, backed by synthesizers and electric guitar riffs. The confident ladies let the fellas in on the motto of the '90s: "I'm a woman, a real woman/ I know just what I want/ I know just who I am," which goes along with the territory when you're *CrazySexyCool*.

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