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BIOS/HISTORY

SHORT BIO

"A folk-pop trio from Seattle, performs funny original songs whose exquisite musical detail and subtle needling wit attain a level of craft not often seen in pop" - NY Times

Imagine what might happen if Tim Burton and Edward Gorey hijacked the Andrews Sisters en route to a Stephen Sondheim festival with The Beatles and Tom Lehrer in the sidecar; you'd get Seattle super-harmonizers Uncle Bonsai. With just three voices and an acoustic guitar, Uncle Bonsai presents an often dizzying vocal array of intricate harmony. Their songs, dark and hilarious at times, just as often delight with moments of great insight and beauty. The trio aligns itself with the under-achiever, the dejected, the outsider, the black sheep. Densely-packed lyrics fly by in a whirr at times, and take a skewed stance on topics such as first-world problems, the creation of the universe, the afterlife, and, of course, holidays with the family. Uncle Bonsai's acoustic folk-pop songs are almost one-act plays or short stories, resisting strict pop, folk, or singer-songwriter categories. Their songs focus on the passing of time, the passing of genes, and the passing of pets - the truth of everything seemingly buried somewhere under the family tree.

Now in its forty-second year, the group has nine recordings, a reversible/hard cover book for parents (and their kids), and recently premiered an all-new show, "Seven Sins, Seven Wonders, Seven Dwarfs," featuring a 25-song song cycle. The group plans to do shows that integrate these songs into their regular material AND will also present the entire show in a series of shows in Fall, 2023.

"Singers Ratshin, O'Neill and Adler are pitch-perfect in their delivery of often complex harmonic arrangements. And if there were an Ella Fitzgerald Award for Exquisite Elocution in Song, they would surely get it. The trio officially bills itself as a "folk" outfit, but has none of the naiveté that label might suggest. These are nicely edgy, sour-sweet songs, written for grown-ups." - The Seattle Times

LONG BIO/HISTORY

"The group has achieved an almost cult status...their music ranges from irreverent to ironic, from satirical to sad. And despite the folk tag, their music defies categorization as it incorporates elements of jazz, pop, Broadway, reggae, and classical." - Associated Press

Uncle Bonsai formed in 1981, when three recent graduates of a tiny college in Vermont migrated to Seattle and found each other in the want ads. Though strangers on the campus of only 600 students, the three quickly came together when one of them put out a call for a folk group to sing sea shanties. Instead, Andrew, the group's guitarist and primary songwriter began writing new songs for the trio, creating a sound that soon became the trio's trademark: high soaring and intricate harmonies, (often biting) humor, and poignant, unflinching portrayals of life, love, and an everyman named "Doug."

The first "show" -- busking outside the gates of the Bumbershoot Festival in Seattle -- brought the group seven dollars apiece, enough to cross the gates onto the grounds in 1981. A year later, Bonsai appeared at that same festival three times, including opening for Firesign Theater in the Opera House, the first of several Bumbershoot and other festival

LONG BIO/HISTORY CONTINUED

appearances across North America. When Seattle's KEZX radio played Bonsai's first recordings, "Suzy" and "Charlie and Me," sold-out houses in the Pacific Northwest followed. Over the next eight years, Uncle Bonsai motor-homed its way around the national folk circuit for club, theater and festival engagements, frequently playing at New York's The Bottom Line, DC's The Birchmere and San Francisco's The Great American Music Hall, among others. The trio received accolades from national press and released three critically acclaimed recordings, *A Lonely Grain of Corn* ('84), *Boys Want Sex in the Morning* ('86), and *Myn Ynd Wymyn* ('88).

Uncle Bonsai's acoustic folk-pop songs are almost one-act plays or short stories, resisting strict pop, folk, or singer-songwriter categories. Consequently, in the '80s the trio paired with a wide range of artists --- Bonnie Raitt, Suzanne Vega, Loudon Wainwright III, Tracy Chapman, They Might Be Giants, The Persuasions, The Bobs, and Robyn Hitchcock -- reflecting a diversity of categorization. In addition to their regular appearances at clubs and festivals throughout North America, the group stretched the boundaries of "folk" music, appearing in a number of theaters, including a run with the improv group None of the Above, for shows at Seattle's A Contemporary Theater.

In 1989, Bonsai the group decided to take a break, but not before performing one final show, a benefit concert before an audience of 8,000 at the Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle. Eight years later, the trio reunited for one night only, to perform and record the "Doug" release and, following up on the success of that evening, which sold out within hours of being announced, started performing bi-annually, writing new songs and winning over new fans. Just a year later, the group recorded a series of live concerts, featuring all new material, that became their eighth release, "*Apology*." Performances throughout the Pacific NW region, and a number of concerts in favorite national clubs, convinced the group to start touring again. In 2007, Patrice O'Neill joined original members Arni Adler and Andrew Ratshin, and three years later, Uncle Bonsai released *The Grim Parade* (2010), a collection of live and studio performances of songs focused on the passing of time, the passing of genes, and the passing of pets -- the truth of everything seemingly buried somewhere under the family tree.

Now in its 42nd year, the group continues to perform and record new material, tackling topics such as first-world problems, the creation of the universe, the afterlife, and, of course, holidays with the family. The group has nine recordings and, in mid-2013, released its first ever bedtime book for grownups, "The Monster in the Closet/Go To Sleep." This fully illustrated, reversible, hard cover book for parents, features two popular Uncle Bonsai songs, with artwork by members Arni Adler and Patrice O'Neill, and includes a recording of the songs. In September 2017, the group released its ninth cd, "The Family Feast: The Study of the Human Condition, First World Problems, and the Lasting Physiological and Psychological Effects of Eating Our Young."

In April, 2023, Uncle Bonsai was proud to present the world premiere of "Seven Sins, Seven Wonders, Seven Dwarfs," an all new 25-song song cycle. The group has integrated many of these songs into the regular show and has plans to perform the entire complete work in Fall, 2024

SOME PRESS QUOTES

"Uncle Bonsai, a folk-pop trio from Seattle, performs funny original songs whose exquisite musical detail and subtle needling wit attain a level of craft not often seen in pop." - Stephen Holden, The New York Times

"Singers Ratshin, O'Neill and Adler are pitch-perfect in their delivery of often complex harmonic arrangements. And if there were an Ella Fitzgerald Award for Exquisite Elocution in Song, they would surely get it. The trio officially bills itself as a "folk" outfit, but has none of the naiveté that label might suggest. These are nicely edgy, sour-sweet songs, written for grown-ups." - Michael Upchurch, The Seattle Times

"The group has achieved an almost cult status...their music ranges from irreverent to ironic, from satirical to sad. And despite the folk tag, their music defies categorization as it incorporates elements of jazz, pop, Broadway, reggae, and classical."

- Carlos Andres Pedraza, Associated Press

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SOME PRESS QUOTES CONTINUED

“No other folk group has a vocal blend comparable to Uncle Bonsai. Uncle Bonsai writes and performs songs that combine folk-oriented melodies with lyrics whose intricate rhymes, ironic knowingness and satirical thrust suggest vintage theater songs filtered through the influence of the Beatles. The group offered more than scintillating cleverness. Songs about sexual manners and role-playing directly confront ticklish situations that one would not ordinarily expect to hear discussed in pop songs with honesty, delicacy and humor.” - Stephen Holden, The New York Times

“The problem with some ‘funny’ songs is that they don’t bear repeated playings. Uncle Bonsai’s songs defy the convention. They’re peanut butter for the brain, spread thick.” - Ed McKeon, Folk Roots, UK

“Whenever depression overwhelms, I remember I still have the Uncle Bonsai records. An intelligent band that’s also funny? Too good to be true.” - Lin Brehmer, WXRT, Chicago

“...vocal harmonizing is sophisticated and soaring, filling up all the empty spaces. Stylistically, they’re adept at everything from opera to jazz, reggae to doo-wop.” - Philadelphia Daily News

“...hilarious and very entertaining, through perfectly meshed voices and acoustic guitar. Every piece is a gem; each has the same kind of quirky sardonic edge that Loudon Wainright III and the Roches work has.” - Greg Quill, Toronto Star

“...humorous, warm, exhilarating, creative and politically courageous. It’s exciting to play their music; it makes me happy.” - Fred Herskowitz, WBAI, NY

“...superb in singing its own witty, arch and hugely entertaining songs...stunningly perceptive and often hilarious.” - Wayne Johnson, Seattle Times

“Uncle Bonsai is one of today’s most talented and entertaining folk vocal trios...sounding at times as sweet as a church choir or skipping and swinging like psychotic Andrews Sisters and brother.” - Jackpot, CMJ New Music Report

“...complex but catchy vocal music...tackle issues most songwriters wouldn’t touch with a 10-foot pen. Their forte is to take the most unusual subjects and deliver them with hot musicianship.” - Larry Kelp, Oakland Tribune

“...innovative approach and a vibrant signature style. At a frenetic pace, with endlessly entertaining wit...notable for zinging one liners that cut through egos and pretensions and cultural blind spots like a scalpel.” - Chris Hill, City Paper, Philadelphia

“Their lyrics are as sophisticated as their harmonics. Folk, jazz, rock, even Gilbert and Sullivan patter-style songs . . . everything is grist for their creative mill. Uncle Bonsai is a treat not to be missed.- Diane Wright, Everett Herald

PRESS PHOTOS

http://unclebonsai.com/photos/UncleBonsai_Wall_204.jpg

http://unclebonsai.com/photos/UncleBonsai_WallWaiting_133.jpg

http://unclebonsai.com/photos/UncleBonsai_WallPortrait_243.jpg

VIDEOS

“Problems” <https://youtu.be/JhoaQ33AXUs>

“Modern Medicine (Old Man Arms)” <https://youtu.be/oCOAnq6eADM>

“Where’s The Milk” <https://youtu.be/xFTMDn0sdbA>

“The Monster in the Closet” <https://youtu.be/MxHjkkQjvws>

For additional information, other links, or copies of recordings, please contact Andrew Ratshin at andrew@unclebonsai.com

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