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Posted: 12:00 AM

Making Noise: Marion Grace sired on 'Yup' and a tank farm

MIKE OLCOTT

It's been a cranked 2010 for Ralph Graceffa and his ramblin'-on outfit Marion Grace. Lighting the fuse was dropping the immensely buzz-worthy debut, "Lying Down, Looking Up," earlier this year, but the dynamite may not have even gone off yet.

Take, for example, the band's announcement of a Marion Grace feature film with the help of Marc Bartholomew and the good folks at Acadia Recording Co. The film might have the trappings of a typical rockumentary, but this time through a distinctively Portland lens.

MG is the kind of band that can't be explained without the help of its place of origin, so the film will include local people, rehearsals and rootsy stage shows. Maybe, just maybe, you can be a part of recorded history if they use footage from Saturday's show at Space Gallery, 538 Congress St., Portland. The show starts at 9:30 p.m.; tickets are \$6 in advance and \$8 day of show.

Graceffa recently took time out to talk to GO:



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How was Marion Grace born?

I had just moved from NYC about five years back and I was hanging at the Ale House every Tuesday night, meeting people and playing with some really great songwriters. One night, about four years ago, I played my solo set and was packing up and Aaron Cloutier (MG's drummer) stopped me and asked if I had any more songs like the ones I sang. "Yup" was the definitive answer.

A week later, he invited me to the "tank farm" where he had a studio. A blues project he was involved with was rehearsing. I walked in as the band was ending their practice and remember seeing Clara Junken (MG singer and guitarist) and her red Gibson. She had soul, presence and just something -- something I couldn't quite explain. She said she'd stay for "one song," and after playing for about three hours, Marion Grace was conceived. It was instant family.

How do your songs come together? Are they written mostly by one person, or does the band develop the ideas in real time?

I sit in my apartment in the East End and write songs, then bring them to the band in a verse, chorus, verse form with the lyrics and melody somewhat set. From there Clara, Aaron, and Josh (Prescott, MG bassist) shape and cultivate the music so as to add the "Marion Grace" element to the songs. Whether it's a few altered chords or added measures, it usually works. I feel lucky to have a band of people that believe in my lyrics and in the way I choose to express this life.

What's most challenging about the Portland market?

In the beginning, we were so happy to have a gig that we jumped into the bar scene. It was fun, fast, loud, and not entirely the direction we wanted to go, but being on stage and exchanging upbeat songs with the crowd was a great experience and taught us a lot about live performance. Problem is we stuck there, in that mold, as a bar band. We wanted to take more risks, write more intricate tunes, and express ourselves in a more creative way. The funny thing is, last year, when we decided to make the album "Lying Down Looking Up" and truly ask Portland to take notice, it happened. People did notice.

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What kind of music is Marion Grace? Soulful, alt-country type indie-rock.

Man, I'd really love to collaborate with: Bob Dylan. I mean, who wouldn't want to sit with him? Jacob Augustine, and it is gonna go down this weekend! We're performing with his newly renamed band, Jacob and the House of Fire at Space Saturday with a Gemini-themed show.

Thing a fan asked you that made you uncomfortable? You can pretty much say anything to me. I'm pretty easygoing. I've been thinking, and I can't come up with a scenario.

What's on **Ralph Graceffa's** iPod?

1. Led Zeppelin
2. Fleet Foxes
3. Black Keys
4. Miles Davis
5. Paul Simon
6. Herbie Hancock
7. Wilco
8. Caalexico
9. Bob Dylan
10. Kings of Leon

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YAHOO!

How has your sound evolved over the course of your career?

We are starting to understand that our music in particular is about a give and take. There has to be an exchange happening all the time and on all levels, inside our heads, in the practice room between the four of us, on stage in front of an the audience, and in the head of each person listening. Adam Frederick, the producer of our record "Lying Down Looking Up," engaged us in such a way to enable each one of us to realize our strengths and potential. He is forever a part of our family.

In what ways are you taking creative risks?

I believe when you allow yourself to trust an outside entity, for instance trusting a producer like Adam Frederick, the game is changed. He actually made it a point to ask me to not listen to any other musician or band for two months before we recorded our album. He didn't want me to "sound" like anyone but me. His production methods were unique, inspiring and have changed a lot of our ideas about what we do.

What do you hope to get better at?

I personally would like to explore the range of my vocals. The songs for our soon-to-be recorded follow-up to "Lying Down Looking Up" come from a new place for me. Without thinking, I have begun to sing songs in a lower register. My great-grandparents were opera singers, so maybe I'm settling into my heritage. As a band, I think we support each other's progressions as musicians from all perspectives, and we openly speak about playing, practicing, performing live, as much as we can to cultivate the true Marion Grace sound.

Mike Olcott is a freelance writer who lives in Portland.


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Warmer temps mean everyone wants to shed a few layers - sometimes right down to the skin. But could you bear topless women walking on the street this summer?

- Yes! Please!
- Of course. It's perfectly natural - even when "the girls" aren't. Then it's natural-ish.
- Oh sure, topless women are okay but wear mirrored shoes to the office and suddenly you're the devil.
- No way. Breasts should be bared only in a safe, private enviroment like your own home or the Internet.
- If parts of your upper body keep jiggling well after your legs have stopped moving, you don't need to be walking topless. Male or female.

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