

1-42

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:: Polyphonic Spree, James Reimer

by Dan Marek



After the untimely death of Tripping Daisy guitarist Wes Berggren in 1999, lead singer Tim DeLaughter began imagining his next musical mission. After months of pondering the multi-layered elements to the music in his head, he began compiling a new project with the other Daisys that would become one of the most talked about acts today.

Following an impromptu performance in Texas, DeLaughter's vision began to take on a physical prowess that no other rock band has dared to attempt in the 25-member Polyphonic Spree.

Filled with high-energy melodies backed by instruments ranging from a full-sized harp, a horn section, melotron, timpani drums and a massive choral section, the band has gained a huge underground following of some of popular music's best and brightest.

1-42 reporter Dan Marek had the opportunity to talk to trombonist Tim Reimer while on break at home in Dallas about the band's history, hype and tribulations since the release of last year's *The Beginning Stages of...*

1-42 :: Well let me start simple. How did the Beginning Stages of the Polyphonic Spree start?

Reimer :: It all kind of started out in Tim's head. He wasn't in a band after the demise of Tripping Daisy and he had this idea for a while, but didn't really do anything with it. But our band manager decided to add the band to an opening slot that was 2 weeks away. That sort of forced Tim's

band to put something together and do something at the time.

1-42 :: So did everyone in the band know each other before hand?

Reimer :: Not at all. I mean a few people, the Tripping Daisy roll-overs (Mark Pirro and Bryan Wakeland), they started it, but the rest of it was like, "I know a friend of a friend who plays this." I wasn't in the first show – a lot of people weren't in the first show – I think there were 12 people total in that show and then after that it just started snowballing. The way it happened for me – it was kind of a convoluted thing – it was a friend of a friend that was like, "I'm in this band that you might be interested in them." So I got to talking to him and I was in.

1-42 :: With so many members it has to be hard to agree on songwriting. How do you initially compose each song?

Reimer :: Basically Tim will come in with a very skeleton idea. I always attribute to a coloring book, where Tim comes in with a coloring book and everyone has a crayon and they color in their parts. So he will come in with an idea written on guitar or piano that is the basic song and then it just takes off. People provide their own parts that they come up with, everyone likes their own parts and that's how our songs become songs.

1-42 :: So when you perform live is there still room for improvisation or do you stick to extended versions pretty well nailed in place?

Reimer :: Well we don't go all avant-garde jazz with 12-minute solos or anything, but there is a lot of improvisation. I think the whole band thing is consistent with continually evolving into different sounds. So it's like if you see us once, then you see us a year from then, I think the songs will sound completely different just because little nuances have changed over that amount of time. There are points where there is dramatic improvisation, but there is a general idea to come up with a part that you play for that song and you stick pretty close to that.

1-42 :: It always seems like you guys are extremely happy on stage. Now that you are going to be hitting the road much harder than you have before, do you think it will be hard for all the members to keep such upbeat attitudes?

Reimer :: Yeah, we are extremely happy on stage. Because when we're out playing these songs together on stage we're having the times of our lives. When we get off the stage, I mean, we're just like anybody else; we have issues in the real world. Especially when you're on the road with this many people, we have bickering and arguments just like anybody else. We've already had a couple experiences, we're a little bit road-tested, we've got a couple of tours now and I think we've worked out the couple of kinks and bugs a little bit. There were some of us that had never done that before and we learned a lot about what it takes to be on the road. There aren't really any big worries about it now.

1-42 :: So what do you think is the most difficult part about having such a big band? It has to be a nightmare trying to keep track of everyone's schedules.

Reimer :: Well the thing about that is, we've learned over two and a half years, that you pretty much have to be responsible for yourself. In most bands there is probably a leeway when it comes to time schedule, but there is no leeway with the time schedule with as many people as we have. So everyone's learned to be responsible for themselves and to be where they need to be when they need to be. The toughest thing at this point is just making it all work. We all come from very different backgrounds. I think that's part of what really makes it work because we are pulling from so many different levels of performance.

1-42 :: I've overheard a lot of people talking at your shows that seem to think you all live in some sort of commune. I know that Tim and his wife live together, but is there some sort of Polyphonic-bunker in Texas somewhere?

Reimer :: There is one house that 4 people from the band live in now, but I would say no.

1-42 :: What about rehearsals?

Reimer :: We don't rehearse as often as most bands, but we have set times when we have them and work our schedules around that. We have a rehearsal space for that, but I wouldn't call it a Polyphonic compound or fortress or anything – I mean we share it with other bands.

1-42 :: Yeah, after hearing that I got these visions of it being something like in the video for "Hanging Around" or something like that.

Reimer :: Yeah, I think a lot of people want to think that. The reality is a little different. We're not all these things you read like a cult, a commune or all straightedge vegans.

1-42 :: It probably has a lot to do with the baptismal gown look.

Reimer :: Yeah definitely. It's really funny to see a lot of the press' take on us and watching their imaginations just run wild. The way that they put their sentences together and the adjectives they use to describe us...

1-42 :: What are some of the funnier ones?

Reimer :: Anyone that uses the Muppet Show always makes me laugh. I've seen that one a few times. You also see a lot of them saying the same things. But anytime we get compared to the Beach Boys meets the Flaming Lips meets the Muppets, I mean...

1-42 :: Yeah, I've seen that a lot.

Reimer :: Exactly. Anytime the Muppets get involved that's just rad. Its like Fraggle Rock or something (laughs) Jim Henson related. I take no offense to that whatsoever.

1-42 :: When I saw you at South by Southwest I noticed that Supergrass and The Coral were on the side stage the entire performance watching. Does that happen a lot?

Reimer :: Well, yeah, actually, Supergrass is one of those. We actually played a show with them at Wimbley Arena the last time we went over there. That's where we kind of met them. One of the band members told someone that they just wanted to see how we did it. (Laughing) At least that's the story I've heard. I guess everyone is just kind of surprised that we could do it and [they] are really supportive. I remember playing the Gig on the Green and we sort of had a full house on the side stage. It was out of sheer curiosity of how we do it, but we seem to have a lot of support from other bands saying it was amazing and asking a lot of questions. So that's pretty cool.

1-42 :: So have you guys been working on a new album?

Reimer :: Actually, we spent the better part of December and January tracking our new record that is hopefully going to be out by Christmas. We are going into mixing after we get back from our first little US jaunt in April and then we go back out in the summer before we go back to Europe.