

MUSIC FOR WATERMELONS



The Aristocrats – FREEZE! Live in Europe 2020 (BOING! Music, 2021)

May 2, 2021 0 By MARCELLO NARDI

If live performances can be considered the polygraph for the virtuoso musicians, few deceive their musicianship during live sets under a blanket of engaging improvisation, masterful execution and -the inevitable secret ingredient- an irresistible use of irony like

The Aristocrats. The rock fusion power trio has built a discography almost equally balanced between studio and live albums. But every fan knows that their live sets are deemed to be amazing and funny performances like no others. And the new release *FREEZE! Live In Europe 2020* perfectly matches the definition above.

FREEZE! Live In E... buy share
by The Aristocrats

Track	Title	Length
1.	D Grade Fuck Movie Jam (Live)	06:58
2.	Spanish Eddie (Live)	08:57
3.	When We All Come Together (Live)	06:36
4.	The Ballad Of Bonnie And Clyde (Live)	07:46
5.	Get It Like That (Live) (Dedicated To Neil Peart)	18:54
6.	Last Orders (Live)	10:50

Guitarist **Guthrie Govan**, bassist **Bryan Beller** and drummer **Marco Minnemann** have garnered a wide attention as instrumentalists and educators even before they played first time as a trio, at the instruments fair NAMM in 2011. And without any doubt their fame contributed building up the rumor around the supergroup, but it took not much to discover **The Aristocrats** had crafted a very unique improvisation practice with an high octane interplay. The three got a career as sidemen, namely with musicians such as **Steve Vai, Steven Wilson, Mike Keneally, Joe Satriani, Hans Zimmer, Asia, Steve Hacket** to name a few they played with, in no specific order. To add their own solo recordings, with particularly **Minnemann** exploring progressive rock leanings, and similarly **Beller** in his latest beautiful effort, *Scenes from the Flood*. And that impressive background explains why the **Aristocrats'** method is not just fastest playing and ripping solos, but complex song structures that sit between rock and fusion, hiding complex rhythms and progressions, balancing microimprovisations, beneath catchy hooks that fish in basically any possible genre.

Take the initial minute of *Spanish Eddie*, one of the five songs in *FREEZE!* taken from the 2019 studio release *You Know What...?*, with the only *Get it Like That* sorted from previous recordings. The band extends it, a typical **Aristocrats** practice, with an initial intro that is an ideal show reel of the practices that the trio enacts to re-interpret their creations live. **Govan** opens it with a flamenco-like strumming on the electric guitar -

balancing the strong attack without distorting the clean sound; **Minnemann** answers it, **Beller** comes third, until they finally join each other in a ride over multiple bar that ends on the snare drum hit at 0.10. For the next ten seconds it's again the guitarist to drive, with the bassist perfectly fitting his pauses. Eventually, a long superfast guitar phrase, where it's the minor seventh interval to dominate, enters in while the bass starts enacting a more structured beat on the lower register. The improvisation dynamics, with subtle and imperceptible changes over the smallest move of each other, is carefully crafted and **Govan** places an octave intervals two notes theme over that at 0.34, almost creating a feeling of something that's starting. But when he plays with a dramatic series of pull offs, **Minnemann** can't do anything but balance it with a folk dance drumming that steals a smile. Bassist and guitarist accept the challenge and answer the drummer back with some dancing riffs, before coming back to the initial flamenco strumming at 0.50. **Beller** plays with the harmonics, preparing the ground for what he will play in the intro bars of the song, but **Govan** kindly advises it's not the time to start yet. So he plays with volume, palm muting the notes on the highest string at 1.10, until it's the moment. The gorgeous legato riff played on the lowest string of the guitar, opening *Spanish Eddie*, drives the band to start the song.

Seamlessly moving through rhythmic and accent riddles, *Spanish Eddie* balances quiet chord progressions, tinged with a fusion vibe that occasionally quote **Steve Vai** - take the whammy bar at 4.12- with nervous breaks, propelled by the sudden outbursts of the drums. Question and answer still plays so much the most important role that, even during the solo, the three prefer to explore interplay rather than fast flaming lines. So, if eventually **Govan** quotes the *Flight of the Bumblebee*, he subsequently loves to move back to elicit **Beller**'s driving lines. And when the track suddenly stops and then starts again with a flamenco strumming feel , it's immediately morphed in a twisted progressive metal, that plays with odd accented bars. That until **Govan** brings back in the intro hand-stretching theme, this time on the higher register. *FREEZE! Live in Europe 2020* was born after only few shows in Spain of the European leg were made, giving the band an unusual short window to practice the songs that usually get overexplored during their extensive tours. Yet they lack no energy in comparison to the past live recordings, and similarly happens with what can be considered their live standard, *Get it Like That*. The song flows smoothly and groovy, with the startling theme riff that combines pentatonic legato with odd-placed accents. The middle section of the song is opened by a gorgeous thirty seconds section at 2.34, blessed by

a 70s dancefloor feel, that itself alone can prove the musicianship of the three in building a groove solid as a wall.

The Aristocrats prefer to slowly build up the tempo with an increasing intensity rather than showing off, until the fast blues at 5.48 morphs back into the main theme and opens for the airy solo by **Beller**. But that's eventually the middle solo by **Minnemann** to be a true gem. During the tour the news of the departure of **Neil Peart**, **Rush**'s drummer and unparalleled maestro of many prog rock drummers, spreaded.

Minnemann pays homage to the Canadian musician with two verbatim renditions of YYZ, with the infamous cowbell intro riff at 10.20, immediately followed by the entire initial bars of another **Rush**'s song, *Tom Sawyer*. Yet the entire solo by the German drummer is an enjoyable and engaging show in itself, with the crisp clear cymbal work combined with his wicked use of the double bass drum. And the inevitable closure on the ending bars of YYZ, this time with the kind support of **Bryan Beller**.

FREEZE! Live In Europe 2020 Montage



When We All Come Together is a playful and fierce exercise of country virtuosism in the style of old-western movies mixed with heavy rock edges -take the wicked bass riff by **Beller** and **Govan** at 1.51 or the following guitar solo at 2.09, during when the guitarist fires it up with additional guitar drive. That all prepares for the suprisingly quiet bridge at 3.33, that merges polyrhythms and open guitar chords. The mood of the song is so intrinsically ironic that the trio doesn't resist to have some question and answer with the audience, before the triumphant closure.

The music of **The Aristocrats** is reveredly devoted to the audience, to entertain, regardless of the virtuosism -or the funniest jokes between the songs that unfortunately this recording doesn't capture. The best way to listen to their music is in a live setting and let it flow playfully and laughing.

The Aristocrats

FREEZE! Live In Europe 2020

1. D Grade F*ck Movie Jam
2. Spanish Eddie
3. When We All Come Together
4. The Ballad Of Bonnie And Clyde
5. Get It Like That (Dedicated To Neil Peart)
6. Last Orders

Guthrie Govan – guitars

Bryan Beller – bass

Marco Minnemann – drums

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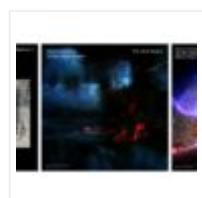
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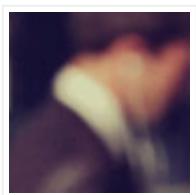
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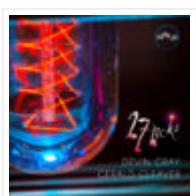
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