

Slavic Soul Party!

Takeatron

Slavic Soul Party! is more than a band, it's a promise. Anyone who has seen them live can attest to that. The massive brass band is a supercollider of Eastern European sounds from the Balkans and all the funk of American musical traditions like second-line, gospel, and jazz. Hybridity isn't just a buzzword with this New York City-based group – domestic and foreign, new and old – it's a fact of life. The fusion even carries over into the title of the band's fifth album, *Takeatron*, mashing up Japanese drummer Take Toriyama's love of electronic music with the rapid fire of Balkan brass, and the incessant creativity of some of New York's finest musicians.

As with fellow Balkan fusionists like **Gogol Bordello** (which has featured SSP! on album) and **Balkan Beat Box** (who borrows SSP! members for tours and recordings), SSP! has connected with audiences at home and abroad. When at home the nine-piece band (give or take a few members, depending on the night) can be found playing Tuesday nights at the hip music club Barbès in Brooklyn, whose signature label is releasing *Takeatron*. The band has also made key appearances at **Carnegie Hall** and the **Kennedy Center**, played weddings and rock clubs, as well as brass band festivals in the Balkans. Bandleader and percussionist Matt Moran continues to see the band's profile rise, but he's most excited about the music's possibilities amongst younger audiences. "We've seen this huge explosion of brass bands in the U.S. and in Europe in the last eight years and it begs a question: why are all these young kids getting into this music when they should be running to the turntables and the electric guitars? Brass bands are like living off the grid or growing your own food: a lot more trouble, a lot more rewarding, and fundamentally subversive. We're not wearing the school uniform, playing the electric guitar, or taking the easy path."

Nevertheless word is getting out, as recently displayed on the band's second time through San Francisco. "We got on stage and played our hearts out, and I look up 20 minutes in and we had 450 people in this club and people were crowd surfing and singing along," recalls Moran. What is particularly remarkable is that SSP! was the only band on the lineup and the audience instantly connected with their set of original songs. A testament to their growing fanbase and solid reputation.

After ten years and four albums, it's no surprise that the band has established their own rules and authenticity to their music. *Takeatron* is their strongest, most accomplished album to date and will surely keep influencing and intriguing musicians from Balkan brass bands like the **Boban Markovic Orchestra** to indie rockers **Arcade Fire**, punk duo **The Dresden Dolls**, **Les Claypool**, and **Sufjan Stevens** to name a few. There's no wonder Sufjan Stevens was quoted saying to *Rolling Stone* about SSP!'s music, "It's terrifying, exhausting, and way more aggressive than a lot of the punk music I've seen." Probably why the above-mentioned rockers have asked SSP! to open for them.

SSP! once again mixes the modern with the tradition on *Takeatron*, an album overflowing with compositions and arrangements from different members of the band. According to Moran, "I think *Takeatron* really shows our original style, more so than any of our other

records. People in the U.S. assume that we are playing traditional Balkan music, but people over there who play in bands say that we totally have our own style. I think with this record we are going to clear up any confusion.”

Taketron showcases its hybridity in “**Sancti Petri**,” which was originally a flamenco guitar tune, or the more electronic music inspired rhythms on tunes like the title track. SSP! also demonstrates how they breath new life to more traditional sounding tunes like the gospel classic “**Canaan Land**” and a little Romanian/Moldovan gem “**Sarba**” (which could pass for a Raymond Scott cartoon classic). Regardless, this band has it own ideas of what a brass band is and it’s big, vivid and brazen if not always Balkan. Yet there is subtlety here as well – enjoy the gentle playfulness of that ska-like backbeat on “**Sviraj Srecko**” and savor the slow elegiac opening to “**Hymn**,” a closer that lets you catch your breath before a final farewell.

Featuring topnotch players from four of the five NYC boroughs including a drummer with roots in Cuba, a trombone player from the southern gospel tradition, an accordion player – a rare instrument in a brass band – from a Balkan Rom (Gypsy) family, a Japanese drummer with a rock star past, and a saxophone player from a Mexican family in Arizona, SSP! is composed of musicians from New York’s downtown jazz scene as well as those who play diverse styles. Moran does this because he likes the creativity and openness that these band members bring to the group.

According to the percussionist, “There has to be a willingness to throw yourself in and forget your ego. To surrender to the Balkan style and trust that your sound will come through. But because of who we are as residents of this crazy technofied place [New York City], all these other influences are gonna come out too. If we put ourselves on the line, we get something electrifying: it sounds kind of Balkan and kinda not; kinda American and kinda funk and soul.”

Barbès label head Olivier Conan explains it best: “SSP!’s music is like ‘surf music’ for the 21st century: instrumental music for this generation with the same bite, insane energy and exotic flavors. *Taketron* is SSP’s first album to capture it all. They are completely liberated from the arbitrary constraints of having to represent another culture’s music. Instead, they have re-invented their own culture.” After 10 years of tinkering with hybrid shapes, *Taketron* is SSP!’s first perfect machine.

Musician List:

John Carlson, Shane Endsley, Ben Holmes - trumpet

Peter Hess, Oscar Noriega - alto sax, clarinet

Peter Stan - accordion

Roland Barber, Brian Drye, Jacob Garchik, Tim Vaughn - trombones

Ron Caswell - tuba

Chris Stromquist, Brook Martinez, Take Toriyama - snare/percussion

Matt Moran - bubanj/bass drum