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# Swimming in a school of ska

Although Reel Big Fish are without a label, they're still a part of the in-crowd

### Reel Big Fish

With Streetlight Manifesto, Suburban Legends and Westbound Train  
Friday, 10 November at 8pm  
The Powerplant

BRYAN SAUNDERS  
Arts & Entertainment Writer

After years of begging to be released from the clutches of their former production company, Reel Big Fish finally got what they wanted. While most bands would cry, OD, or vanish into the deep blue if they lost their contract, Reel Big Fish was so thrilled that they were gasping for air.

"All a record company is supposed to do is to get your record out and provide publicity for you," says Reel Big Fish trumpeter John Christianson. "[But] over the ten years, the record company wasn't doing anything. So we were very happy to be off the label, because we could do all the work, and actually see money from the record sales. All the things we've always wanted to put out we can now give to the fans, without delay, without going through record company approval and without doing demos for the record company."

Now about midway through their autumn tour, dubbed the "Fall of Ska," Reel Big Fish took some time to answer other important questions—

such as, does their tour name imply that this fall season will be full of Ska music, or are they suggesting that Ska music is "flounder"-ing as a genre?

**"All the things we've always wanted to put out we can now give to the fans, without delay, without going through record company approval and without doing demos for the record company."**

JOHN CHRISTIANSON

With enough warmth, happiness and enthusiasm to nourish an entire village of elementary school children, Christianson is happy to explain.

"I don't think [the genre of ska] has 'gone' anywhere," he says. "I think this is another wave, and we're riding the crest of that wave."

Riding the crest of waves is definitely a familiar pastime for the group, especially since they're based in Orange County, California. And while on the topic of weather—if we can even say that the Fish can stay on

one topic at a time—Christianson isn't ashamed to state his fear of autumn in Edmonton and the -12C temperature.

"Holy shit! That's really damn cold," Christianson tells his fellow bandmates, who're scattered about the room behind him, engaged in various activities. Gasps and swears of disbelief abound.

"I'm going to have to go shopping for some warmer clothes," he adds.

Surely a band called Reel Big Fish has seen stranger things than snow, though.

"Oh yeah, you know, we get a lot of strange things to sign ... and we actually signed a guy's dead grandmother's prosthetic leg. And that was ... really strange. Yeah ..."

Reel Big Fish doesn't seem to have any real problem with people bringing other people's prosthetic limbs to shows for autographs, though, and things to do at Big Fish shows are just as chaotic.

"Come to the shows to forget all your problems, to relax, to have a good time, to dance," Christianson says. "Do that at the shows, don't be afraid to dance, don't be afraid to yell and scream, and don't be afraid to say hi to us if you see us on the street."

And the don'ts?

"Umm, don't punch each other," Christianson concludes.

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### Weird Al Yankovic

*Straight Out Of Lynwood*  
Way Moby/Volcano  
www.weirdal.com

PHIL HEAD  
Arts & Entertainment Staff

*Straight out of Lynwood* has the types

of songs we've come to expect from Weird Al—such as polka arrangements of recent popular songs—but despite the album's familiar feel, it can also easily be described as his best release to date, for Al slowly continues to improve on both his humour and musical proficiency.

"Canadian Idiot" alone is reason enough to buy the album, if only for the secret thrill we get when our existence ends up being acknowledged by foreigners. Also, the fact that the Chamillionaire parody "White and Nerdy" has broken into the billboard top ten attests to the overall quality of this compilation.

While most famous for his parodies, *Straight out of Lynwood* also features original songs that showcase Al's

ability to channel disparate musical influences. For instance, "Virus Alert" brilliantly captures the feel of cheesy '80s pop while simultaneously avoiding being cheesy itself, and "Pancreas" feels like a lost Beach Boys track.

Unfortunately, at nearly eleven minutes, the R Kelly spoof "Trapped In The Drive Through" drags on way too long. Also, it's a pity his parody of James Blunt's "You're beautiful" wasn't included, due to a dispute with Blunt's record label.

And since "Don't Download This Song" isn't enough of a warning to fans about illegal downloading, *Lynwood* comes as a dual disk packed with videos, documentaries and other goodies to get people to shell out their clams for the genuine article.