

Marvel at Marvelle

Local musicians Marvelle bring violins, live art and innovation to the Twin City's stage

BY JACK SPENCER

In a local scene as diverse and talented as that of the Twin Cities, Marvelle somehow manages to stand out among the rest. The rock band "with indie and classical sprinkled on top" consists of John Holm on violin, Derek Winter on bass, Brian Herb on drums, and Linnea Maas doing live painting. The band configuration itself sets Marvelle apart from other local musicians. While they sound heavy, with thundering bass lines bellowing beneath haunting violin riffs, they retain the composure of classical music, and produce a full sound despite stripped-down instrumentation. Holm and Winter alternate singing on songs, each providing a differing vocal style that compliments the other. Winter comes off as a conductor live, waving his hands and making eye contact with the other members. As the musicians perform, Maas paints a canvas that adds a visual element to the show, playing off the music and adding a unique element to the stage show. After interviewing the band at The Wienery, *The Wake* caught their performance at the Triple Rock, where they shared the stage with other bands that featured the violin. It became clear that Marvelle's use of the instrument is unique compared to most others in town. Holm humbly eschewed Winter's gauntlet-dropping proclamation that he was the "best violinist in town." "Better not say that," Holm warned. "People are going to start challenging me to duels." Though he is a particularly talented violin player, what sets Marvelle apart from other bands is the role of the violin. Most bands tend to incorporate string instruments as an atmospheric element or a compliment to the lead instruments, delegating them to the background as support for the more traditional guitar-bass-drum setup.

"Whenever I see that, it's really frustrating as a violinist," says Holm, who does just the opposite in Marvelle. The violin comes to the forefront, belting attention-grabbing leads without becoming overbearing. The band manages to retain a sound that is captivating while not overly bombastic. Marvelle's songs, which stray from the standard rock format, often resemble waltzes and incorporate multiple time signatures.

"I got so sick of playing the 4/4 rock thing in guitar bands; it gets old after a while," Winter says, and it's clear from Marvelle's sound that the band was looking to create something different from the norm of rock music. Marvelle has done collaborations with spoken



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word artist Isis, who takes over vocal duties for one of the band's songs, blending poetry and hip-hop elements into the band's overall baroque sound. This works surprisingly well and reiterates the fact that Marvelle has opened themselves to new ideas and notions of music. Incorporating live art into the band's set each night is another example of their individuality.

"I firmly believe in the blending of different art styles," Winter iterates. "I think that's what the future is." Artist Maas completes a full canvas by the time Marvelle's set is done, which is no small feat. "She gets cat calls every once in a while," Winter recalls. "Turn up more art in the monitor!" She was nervous about painting onstage with the band initially, which requires a very different approach than painting offstage.

"Derek was asking me for a month to get on stage, trying to convince me I could handle it," she says. Seeing Maas in action, it is clear she can handle it. Her art has a vibrancy that works sublimely in conjunction with the music surrounding it. "I usually have a pretty good idea of what I'm doing before I get up there. I know their music so well that I just daydream to it all day long." Her connection to the music is strong and it comes out in the art, which can be seen on the band's mySpace page and is put up for auction at the end of performances. The live art angle comes off neither as a gimmick or an unnecessary flourish, but a fully-fledged ele-

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ment of the band, another aspect of the group's dynamic that extends beyond the sound.

Marvelle has played extensively since their inception, having hit nearly every venue in the city that's not theatre-sized. Their biggest show to date was opening for Firewater at the Triple Rock, a sold-out show for which they were the only opening band. "There's a lot of competition in this town. I wouldn't think there'd be room for bands that weren't part of the 'good ol' boys' club," Winter says, decrying City Pages "Picked To Click" best new artists list, which mostly comprised of musicians who were formerly in other popular local bands. "But surprisingly it's pretty accepting. Being around for five, six months and being able to play a sold out show at the Triple Rock is pretty exciting." The band is steadily building a name for itself. They have played shows alongside Magic Castles, A Ghost in the Water, Military Special, Muja Messiah and Toki Wright, moving from one venue to the next as they expose their sound to a wider audience.

"We've sort of done it backwards...most bands release an album, then get some press and are able to get some shows," Winter says. "Luckily I have friends from being a booking agent, and just from the sake of playing shows we've gotten other shows. Venues have seen us and invited us back." Marvelle is currently in the process of recording an album. The band has been occupying Orchestra Hall, "sneaking in guerrilla style" in the hours between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m., laying down tracks for the release. "I don't think it's illegal, necessarily. It's sort of a gray area. We're very respectful of the space," says Holm, who works at Orchestra Hall. "I don't think anyone's going to have a problem with it. As long as none of us touch the harp." The album is expected out by spring.

Marvelle brings a startlingly original sound to the Twin Cities rock scene, sparse yet fleshed-out, avant-garde yet unpretentious. The talent of the band members is clear, ("There is not one violinist in town that can hold a candle to this man's ability, I kid you not," Winter speaks of Holm, dropping the gauntlet once again), and the songs have a striking quality about them that captures the audience's attention and refuses to let it go. The energy they maintain through their live performances is impressive, and the live painting brings a new and interesting component to the music. Standing out from the rest is a difficult task in our local music scene, but Marvelle rises to the challenge each and every time.

Marvelle is playing a show at 7th St Entry with Rumble Strips (England) and Birdmonster (San Francisco), 10/23, 18+, doors at 8 p.m., \$10