



ASYLUM STREET SPANKERS

Since 1995, Austin, Texas' Asylum Street Spankers have purveyed their love of 1920s and 30s ragtime, pre-war blues, and early jazz into a full-fledged, extremely witty, unamplified hootenanny that's won over thousands of fans. Led by vocalist Christina Marrs and harmonica/washboard player/vocalist Wammo, the group has explored the joys of pre-war raunch ('96's *Nasty Novelties*), languorously expounded on the thrill of earthly vices ('97's *Spanker Madness*), and, on 2004's *Mercurial*, taken on Black Flag and the Beastie Boys. Now they've harnessed what Rolling Stone describes as their "inspired, lunatic brilliance," and applied it to kids' music.

Remember Marlo Thomas' *Free To Be You and Me*, and the brilliantly insane Carl Stallings scores that provided the backdrop for Bugs Bunny's Saturday morning antics? Take a heaping spoonful of each then blend with a chapter of *How To Eat Fried Worms* and a couple of mintcondition Wacky Packs stickers. Fold in a lullaby and your favorite stuffed animal, and you've got the perfect recipe for *Mommy Says No!*, a twelve-song musical ode to childhood.

The Asylum Street Spankers' seventh studio album – and their first for veteran roots label Yellow Dog Records – might be family friendly fare, but it certainly pulls no punches: Just try to follow Wammo's tongue twisters on "You Only Love Me For My Lunchbox," or attempt to resist the sweet nostalgia of "Sidekick." Blast the propulsive title track, a Spike Jones-influenced slam dance contender, or slow dance to a waltz version of Harry Nilsson's "Think About Your Troubles," which features a warbling musical saw.

Three of these songs, "Be Like You," "Don't Turn Out the Light," and the aforementioned "Sidekick," are compositions penned by Marrs, the only parent in the group (her son Coltrane serves as the cookie-stealing cover model on the album cover).

"This was an idea that's been tossed around for years," Marrs says, admitting in her next breath that "the project may have been a little baffling for a couple of the guys, who may have initially thought that they didn't know how to write songs for a kids' record."

Nevertheless, Wammo and Sick, the Spankers' resident guitarist/fiddler/mandolin player, effortlessly channeled their inner five-year olds – no easy feat, according to fellow band mates, who had to endure wedgies, whoopee cushions, and endless thumb wrestling bouts.

An improbable (well, veteran listeners know to expect the unexpected) cover of Nirvana's "Sliver," which is distilled into an Appalachian bluegrass jam, rounds out the album.

The musicianship – all acoustic instruments, of course – is as sophisticated as ever, either as a stripped-down version of the group, or the full ensemble, with clarinet, trumpet, sousaphone, saxophone, and trombone. Whether you're turning up the dueling guitars on "Boogers," tapping along to the propulsive rhythm track on "Everybody Loves My Baby," or shimmying to the horn-driven second line strut that drives the ruminative "When I Grow Up," you'll hear classic Spankers elements shining throughout the album.

And lyrically, *Mommy Says No!* is hilarious, a worthy contender to Dr. Seuss and Shel Silverstein's treasured works. Gorgeously produced, and chock full of brazen satire (for the sweeter side of the Spankers' songwriting, check out "Training Wheel Rag" or the fairytale-like "Super Frog"), it's a rich listening experience for audiences of all ages.

"There's not a lot of music out there for kids that a true music fan is going to enjoy," says Marrs, who has an avowed anathema of Yanni, the Wiggles, and that singing purple dinosaur. "Even the so-called hip children's music I find intolerable," she adds with a laugh.

"In my house, where there's always been plenty to listen to, the kids like our music anyways. There's something about the band's sound and energy that appeals to them, so why not make a Spankers record that's family friendly," she muses.

"Even so, Mommy Says No! doesn't have to be finely defined as a children's record," she says of the album, which was cut at the Still Recording Studio in Austin. "I think our fans, no matter how old they are, are gonna really like it. The random parent who hasn't heard us before will find something cool and fun for their kids that won't drive them crazy. And, for the young ones, we've got that brand recognition kicking in early!"