

Created by: Debra C. Argen

Jay Beckenstein - Interview

Jay Beckenstein, Founder of [Spyro Gyra](#) takes time from touring for an interview with Luxury Experience Magazine.

LEM:



Jay, Congratulations on your latest release, **Good To Go-Go**, on the [Heads Up International](#) label, which marks Spyro Gyra's 26th release over an incredible period of 30+ years.

Ever since the band released their first album in 1976, followed by the now iconic **Morning Dance** released in 1979, Spyro Gyra has set the stage for jazz-fusion.

Spyro Gyra is not "pure" Jazz, but rather a mix of Jazz, Caribbean and Brazilian sounds, how did the concept for the band come about?

Jay:

It was just kind of a natural thing. The formation of the band members grew up at a special time. We loved the Beatles, Led Zeppelin, Latin music (me) and broad influences.

Not having a defined genre though has its plusses and minuses. On the plus side, we do anything that we want, which is a dream for an artist. On the minus side, not having a defined genre (Jazz, Caribbean, etc) sometimes confuses the press.

LEM:

When many new bands hit the music scene they make 1 album and then either disappear or the band dissolves. Nominated for 10 Grammy Awards, to what do you attribute the band's core personnel's longevity and success (Jay, Tom Schuman - keyboards since 1978, Julio Fernandez - guitar since 1984, Scott Ambush - bass)?

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Jay:

You nailed it; the people involved are very generous, tolerant and fine people, able to work with individual quirks and understanding. Fortunately, I have been associated with nice, reasonable people who are not caught up with egos, and for that, it is a blessing; we are a band of brothers.

The industry is really geared to having one star in the band with supporting musicians. With us and with the Jackets (Yellowjackets), we are about the whole group. The whole band focus is a rare concept. With the advent of music videos it is not the magic of five people making music together, but about the front man and then the band.

LEM:

With the addition of Bonny Bonaparte "Bonny B" (drums, percussion, vocals) who adds his Caribbean influence on **Good To Go-Go**, Spyro Gyra has taken another turn. This new release really showcases the continually evolving style of the band. What did Bonny B bring to the group?

Jay:

His energy! He is terrific drummer as he would have to be, but he is really a spirited, positive, energy force. I do not know if you can identify his "positivity" and his absolute joy on the record. People crave experiences that show people who are positive, creative, and enjoying life.

LEM:

You started playing piano at age 5 and the saxophone at age 7, taking lessons in elementary school, and continuing to play in Germany while you were in high school for your senior year; it seems like you had a jump-start on most musicians.

Although you grew up around music, who inspired you musically?

Jay:

For all of us in the band, our parents were our jump-start; they were either musicians or crazy about music. My mother was an opera star and my father loved music and was an amateur jazz musician.

Early on, I listened to my father's music - Dizzy Gillespie and others, and my mother's - Mozart and Beethoven, but by the time I was 11 and heard the Beatles, I thought wow, that is cool, and I was lost to their musically pure world forever.

LEM:

The band travels around the world performing, most recently in Den Hague, Budapest, and Istanbul. What influences are you seeing in your travels? Is the international scene different than in the United States?

Jay:

What I have noticed is that people are really hooked on American music; especially Rhythm & Blues based music and pop music.

In Budapest we did something unique, playing a private show at an extremely fabulous art gallery restaurant, called [Kogart House](#), where we played for an hour and then had dinner with the audience. It was a Who's Who of ambassadors and top executives, and it was a great evening.

LEM:

Between releases, do the band members work on their own projects?

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Jay:

Some of us do. Tom produces for other musicians; Scott makes basses (www.ScottAmbush.com); Julio lives in Hoboken and is the king down there, always doing stuff downtown, playing jam sessions; and me, well, I am raising three daughters, ages 13, 17 and 19 years.

LEM:

It sounds like you have your hands full. What new music do you like to listen to?

Jay:

I like mellow music, John Mayer and Nora Jones, although my girls are responsible for a lot of the new music that I hear, and I like Ani DiFranco.

LEM:

Are your daughters interested in jazz?

Jay:

My middle daughter, Alexandra, loves jazz but she uses it for relaxation, to chill. I like to listen to jazz to rev me up. I want them to listen to Miles Davis.

LEM:

Someday they will get Miles Davis. As for chilling or revving, it all depends on the style of jazz. Listening to Billie Holiday, you cannot help but feel romantic or want to just ease back. Play *Morning Dance*, how can you be anything but revved up?

If you had the opportunity to play with any musicians (living or dead) whom would you have like to have played with?

Jay:

That is an interesting question; it is a toss up between Miles Davis and Leonard Bernstein.

LEM:

What keeps you motivated after all of these years?

Jay:

After many of the shows that we do, we go out and sign autographs and meet the people coming to the shows, and it is really cool to meet all of these people. When they thank us for the music, it means that maybe my existence has not been totally meaningless.

LEM:

As a long time fan, I would hardly call what you do meaningless. What's next for Spyro Gyra?

Jay:

Touring to support the new release, **Good To Go-Go**, which we started in Europe and will do this summer touring the United States. We also have the beginnings for the next album and are working on that.

LEM:

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Thank you, Jay, and once again, congratulations to you and the band on your latest release, **Good To Go-Go**, available in stores on June 12, 2007 and also at [Amazon](#), [Buy.com](#), [Silver Platters](#), and [CD Universe](#).

To read a reveiw of **Sypro Gyra's Good To Go-GO** see the **Music Scene- Spyro Gyra - Good To Go Go**.

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