

Albatross Antics

by Jeff Geiger

Track One

Johnny Burkemeister, lead vocals and flutist of the band Albatross Antics, sits on his bed thinking in silence. His elbow rests on his knee, and his palm on his forehead with his fingers running through his dirty-blond hair. He is staring at a copy of Paste Magazine with him, and everyone else in Albatross Antics, on the cover. He picks it up and flips to the cover story that he has read countless times, and little did he know, that this would be the last time. It read:

"I, Dave Simms, finally get the chance to talk to the phenomenal new rock band, Albatross Antics. I interviewed them in their luxurious residence on Fifth Avenue in New York City. They offered me a beer, which I gladly accepted and then I was introduced to the band members. There is songwriter, lead vocalist, and flutist, Johnny Burkemeister, and his brother Arlo Burkemeister who plays a Gibson EDS-1275 double neck guitar. The third member of the band is the drummer Alistair Anderson who sings as well. The bassist, Bishop Ilori, plays a headless Steinberger bass, a bass that I have seen on very few occasions. The violinist, Mairi Skye, has an interesting piece of equipment. It is an electric violin created by Mark Wood of Trans-Siberian Orchestra. Last, but not least, there is the talented Oni Kishi. She plays the keyboard and synthesizer, provides female vocals, and is the DJ.

Dave Simms: How did this band start? How did you all come together?

Johnny Burkemeister: Well, Arlo and I have been playing music since we were five, and frankly, we just loved it. During my senior year in high school, the thought of creating a real band, not some petty garage one, entered my mind. The two of us got accepted into

Juilliard, and with each passing month, the idea became more and more promising. It turns out that Mairi, Oni, Arlo, and I were all in the same orchestra. The four of us united and started to hunt for other members. One night, the four of us went to eat at the Café What? and Bishop happened to be playing there. He was playing Victor Wooten's version of *Amazing Grace*, and man was it amazing. I confronted him after his gig and told him we were in need of a bassist, and he gladly joined.

Bishop Ilori: Johnny then told me that they were still in need of a drummer. I told him that my friend Alistair and his band would be playing the next night at the café. During the performance, however, the lead singer and guitarist got in an argument and the show ended halfway in. I went in the back and told Alistair 'bout this new band, and even though he wanted to work and try to help his old band, he knew it would be hopeless, so he joined.

JB: With the band complete, we started to rock.

DS: So how did you come up with the name Albatross Antics? What's with the suits and bowler hats?

Alistair Anderson: Well, the name was actually my idea.

BI: Yeah, I remember now, didn't it have to do with your initials?

AA: Yes, it did. One day I was just fooling around with my initials on a piece of paper while thinking about a band name. Then I started thinking of words that began with the letter "A" and somehow Albatross Antics popped in my head. Now the suits, I believe, were Johnny's idea.

JB: Yeah. I wanted the band to play in style, not just average clothing. By having an image, we could also be remembered. Actually, I thought of suits after watching the *Blues Brothers* movie.

(Laughs). So I decided that the band would wear white shirts with a black tux and a black bowler hat with white trim. I, however, would wear the exact opposite: black shirt with a white tux and a white bowler hat with black trim. By combining our name with our outfits, we created our logo: an albatross with a bowler hat.

DS: Very interesting story, so now how di-

Johnny can't stand it anymore. Eyes on the verge of watering, he stands, tears up the magazine, and throws it across the room. That issue was from five years ago. The times have changed. He storms out of his room to find his brother. Arlo is watching a James Bond special on their Sony HDTV, and he looks up when Johnny enters. Their eyes lock for a few moments and Arlo knew something wasn't right. Before he can ask, Johnny speaks.

"We're getting the band back together."

Track Two

What do you mean by 'getting the band back together?'," asked Arlo.

"I mean exactly what I mean," said Johnny, "I know this will be hard, but we have to reunite and make music again. It's what we were meant to do. "

"How, Johnny? How? We have no idea where anyone else is! It's going to be a dead end wherever we look! It's hopeless Johnny, hopeless.

“That's where you're wrong, brother. We can do this...I don't know how...but we can and we will. Mairi and Oni are still performing...I think...”

“And what about Alistair? How are we going to get him back? I highly doubt that he will want to play with us again after what happened to Bishop. They were like brothers, Johnny, like you and me. Think about that for a moment.”

Johnny slumps down onto the couch next to his brother. The TV was turned off and Johnny blankly stares at his reflection in the dark screen. He sighs and rubs his temples. Arlo is right, how could they form the band again after what happened to Bishop.

INTERIOR: FIFTH AVENUE — BAND'S APARTMENT — FAMILY ROOM — NIGHT

Albatross Antics has just returned from a 3-month tour around the country. Tired and weary, Johnny, Oni, Arlo, and Alistair plop on the couch and turn on the tube. Mairi and Bishop depart to their rooms to rest.

ONI: Man, what a day. I feel so tired, yet it feels like I've been asleep forever.

ARLO: That makes no sense whatsoever. Ya know, if ya slept normally and didn't party every moment like the rest of us, ya wouldn't feel that way.

ONI: Me? Party all the time? You're the one that disappeared for a day.

ARLO: (Laughing) I didn't disappear for a day, you slept for a day.

ALISTAIR: (Laughing) You should've seen him, Oni. He did some crazy stuff that day.

ARLO: Nah, it wasn't crazy, just average.

ALISTAIR: Ya call running around the tour bus in a cape and underpants average?

JOHNNY: (Laughing) You should have seen what absurd stuff he did before the band.

ONI: Well, I'm going to hit the sack. See ya all in the morn.
G'night

Oni sleepily walks to her bedroom.

ALL: Night Oni

The three continue to watch TV for a couple of minutes.

JOHNNY: Eh, the TV isn't doing it for me. I'm going to write some stuff in my room for a few minutes before I sleep. Good night.

Johnny departs to his bed.

ALL: Good night Johnny.

Thirty minutes go by and Arlo and Alistair are still watching TV.

ARLO: So, whatcha think will happen with the band in the next few days?

ALISTAIR: I dunno. Your brother will probably write another song and we'll practice it.

ARLO: Yea, probably. I wonder what it'll be like. I suppose I'll go to bed now. See ya later.

ALISTAIR: Later

Arlo leaves and Alistair continues to watch TV. A few moments go by and Alistair shuts off the television. He realizes he forgot his drumsticks in Bishop's room. He walks over to Bishop's door and cracks it open. The door hits an object on the floor and Alistair hears it roll. Thinking the object is his drumstick Alistair picks it up. It's a bottle, an empty bottle. Alistair flicks the light switch. He sees Bishop limp on the bed, eyes closed. There's a needle and elastic cord on his lap.

Track Three

Johnny recalls the song notes he wrote on that horrid night.

Song: Soft, mellow. Very instrumental, little singing. Name: Funeral of the...? Death of a Cardinal. Arlo: Guitar: Acoustic, smooth, folk-like. Me: Flute solo at end, no singing. Oni: Grand piano, no synth, the only vocals. Mairi: Violin: Powerful, yet sad solo at the beginning. No electric, nice and clean. Alistair: Drums: simple hi-hat and snare beat with brushes. Driving beat, yet soft. Bishop: Simple bass beat, no solo. No part.

He couldn't believe how eerie those notes were. The night he wrote his first soft and sad song for Albatross Antics, Bishop died. He wanted to burn them and never think of them again, but Alistair stopped him. Alistair said that Bishop would have liked to be remembered in a song. Alistair was wise, for the song Death of a Cardinal was one of their greatest hits, next to The Paladin Songs.

“Well, it's too late in the day to search for them now,” said Johnny, “See if you can find any info about Mairi and Oni on the Internet. I'm going to go to my room and think. This is some major task ahead of us.” Johnny gets up from the couch, goes to his room and shuts the door. He walks over to his iMac and opens his iTunes. Johnny plays songs by Albatross Antics, more specifically, The Paladin Songs. He then lies down on his bed and stares at the ceiling, listening to the music:

So much depends
Upon

The dusk black
Knight

The armor is
Honored

The lustrous sword
Feared

His suicide task
Legendary

The first song ends, and Johnny still has no idea what to do. He starts to think of Mairi.

INTERIOR: FIFTH AVENUE — BAND'S APARTMENT — KITCHEN
— DAY

It has been almost two months since Bishop's passing and Alistair has already left the band. Albatross Antics has been performing for about 2 weeks and starting to get back into the normal routine playing music. Mairi and Johnny are in the kitchen talking.

MAIRI: I just don't think I can do this anymore Johnny. We went from six members to four. We can't play all of our songs, and if we do, we have to hire replacements. Frankly, those temps flat-out suck. It just isn't the same, it never will be, and I don't think I can handle that.

JOHNNY: I know it will never be the same, but we have to pull through. Bishop wouldn't want us to stop playing altogether.

MAIRI: (starting to sob) Don't you bring Bishop into this! Don't start playing that card to make me feel bad! Don't!

JOHNNY: I'm sorry.

Home is behind
The fight ahead
There are many trails to be tread

Through shadow
To the edge of blight
Until the flames are all alight

Mist and twilight
Cloud and shade
All shall fade

All shall fade

JOHNNY: I'm really sorry, but please, don't go.

MAIRI: I am also sorry. My bags are already packed and I have said my good-byes. I will still be musically active, so I might see you around. Good-bye Johnny.

They hug. Mairi kisses Johnny on the cheeks. Sobbing, she turns away and exits the apartment. Johnny sits down on a stool at the bar. He sits there for the rest of the night.

The Paladin finds
The castle of the foul gnoll
With flame sword in hand

Charging at the gate
He knows of what is to come
Both will be fallen

The hirsute gnoll stands
Looking at his challenger
The king draws his axe

Their eyes interlock
The beast attacks the black knight
He counters and swings

The fight continues
Until the man is knocked down
Blade thrust upwards

The vile gnoll is pierced
Yet so is the paladin
The task is finished

"Johnny!" Arlo yelled, "I found Mairi!"

Track Four

Look!" exclaimed Arlo, pointing at the screen of his MacBook. "Dr. Mairi Skye. She's a professor at Juilliard! Turns out she did remain in the music business. Well, it shouldn't be too hard to find her now. Man, it's amazing what happens in two years."

"Yeah, it's great to know that she became successful. Shall we leave tomorrow in the morn?"

"Sounds good to me. Have you found anything about Oni yet?" asked Johnny.

"No, not yet," replied Arlo, "But I think Mairi will be able to help us. Do ya think that she'll be willing to leave her sound job to help get the band back?"

"We should be able to get her back. It's been awhile and all of the commotion has settled...yet she still might be a tad reluctant...I'll try to think of a plan. Good night for now."

The two go to their separate rooms. Johnny enters his room and sits at his cluttered desk to jot down some quick song ideas. A few minutes later dives onto his bed. Thinking about tomorrow, he slowly drifts to sleep.

The next morning the brothers arrive at the campus of Juilliard. After much wandering and asking many students for directions, Johnny and Arlo find Dr. Mairi Skye's classroom.

"Here goes nothing," whispered Johnny to Arlo.

Knock, knock. "Who is it?" asked Mairi.

"Some old friends," replied Arlo.

The brothers enter the lecture hall and see Mairi at her desk. She looks up, gasps, and stands up.

"Wh-wh-wha?" stuttered Mairi.

Her students look up from their papers and gasp as well. They have all just witnessed three of the six band members of Albatross Antics in one location since they broke up.

"Mairi, we're getting the band back together," said Johnny with a grin on his face, "We can do this Mairi. Don't you want to perform again?"

"Yes, b-b-but, how? Do you expect me to just leave my job and go with you guys?"

"Umm...yea...pretty much," said Johnny.

"I thought you came up with a plan, Johnny," whispered Arlo.

"Nope," said Johnny, smirking.

Fifteen minutes later and after much persuasion, Mairi rejoined Albatross Antics.

Track Five

"It's great to have ya back, Mairi," said Arlo, " So, does that Ph.D. brain of yours have any idea where Oni is?"

"Sadly, I do not," replied Mairi, "She could be anywhere in New York. Hell, she could've moved and be halfway across the country. As

you know, a lot can happen in two years. Anyways, as we try to find out our next step, let's eat some lunch. I'm starving." Mairi laughs and looks to Johnny. He smiles and the two look at each other for some time. "I've really missed you guys. C'mon, lets go."

The three exit the building and enter into the fresh spring air. It's a beautiful day with the cherry trees in bloom and lush, green grass covering the land. They pass an orchestra playing remarkable classical music in an outside amphitheater. Some of the students wave at Mairi.

"This place sure hasn't changed a bit," said Johnny, "So what is it like teaching here?"

"Well," said Mairi, "It's a lot more challenging then being in a band, that's for sure," Mairi laughs, "Yet it is also a great deal of fun. Actually, it's only fun when I'm giving hands-on demonstrations. The lectures, on the other hand, are rather boring. So what have you two been doing these past years?"

"Not much...not much at all," said Johnny, "Thankfully we were a successful band, so we've just been living off of that. I've still been writing songs, mainly for guitar and flute since obviously there isn't anything else...well 'till now. I also published an autobiography."

"Oh yea," said Mairi, "I've read it and I'm quite impressed. You can write music and stories."

"Yea," said Arlo laughing, "Who knew?"

The group arrives at the parking lot and they were nearing Johnny's car. He unlocks the BMW Z4 and the four climb in. The CD player is playing an AA song with a mind-blowing solo by Oni.

INTERIOR: CAFÉ WHA? — MAIN ROOM — NIGHT

The remaining three band members, Johnny, Arlo, and Oni sit in a booth at the Café Wha? enjoying a nice dinner. A solo acoustic guitarist is on the stage playing some very nice Beatles covers, such as *While My Guitar Gently Weeps* and *Revolution*. The band is sitting at their normal six-person booth, and Oni can't help but stare at the three empty seats.

ARLO: (Pointing to the guitarist) This guy is pretty good, but not as good as me.

ONI: (Laughing) C'mon, you serious? I can play better than him.

ARLO: (Laughing) Pfft. You can play guitar as well as I can play piano. I said he was good, not great.

ONI: Meh, whatever. So...um...Johnny...What do we do now? We're down to three people...

JOHNNY: Yea...and there are plenty of three-person bands. We stick together and keep performing. What else can we do?

ONI: I dunno Johnny, I dunno. This just doesn't feel...right...

JOHNNY: No Oni, please, don't go. Why would you want to go? We are doing perfectly fine.

ONI: I just need some time alone. We've been together three years and I think I just need to do something different, go solo, I don't know, just anything but this. I'm sorry.

Oni gets up and starts to walk out. Johnny stands up.

JOHNNY: ONI! WAIT!!

Oni pauses for a moment, tears streaming down, she looks back at Johnny. She turns and continues to walk away.

"So where are we going to eat?" asked Arlo

"How about the Café Wha? for old time's sake?" said Mairi.

"That's fine with me," said Johnny.

"And me," Arlo chimed in.

Johnny takes the next right and in a few moments the Z4 is outside of the Café Wha?. The musicians unload from the car and go into the café. Without thinking twice, they sit in their booth and order their usual food. Sitting there, Arlo bobs his head to the music until it clicks in his mind. He knows this song, this tune, and this style. The music is coming from a piano. It is a piano being played by the graceful hands of Oni Kishi. Arlo looks at the stage, jaw dropping, he nudges Johnny in the side with his elbow. Johnny looks at his brother, then to his brother's target, and Johnny's mouth drops as well. Mairi notices this and turns around to see what they are staring at.

"It..." said Mairi.

"Cant..." said Arlo.

"Be..." said Johnny.

"Is..." said Mairi.

"That..." said Arlo.

"Oni?" said Johnny.

“ONI!” they all simultaneously yell.

Oni Kishi looks up and sees three of her closest friends on the other side of the room. She abruptly stops her playing, stands up, and runs off stage to meet them.

“Is that you guys? Is that really you?” asked Oni as she reaches everyone. She runs over to Johnny and hugs him. “I-I-I’m sorry Johnny, I really am. I should’ve never gone solo Johnny, ‘twas a bad idea. I’ve missed you all so much. ‘Twas a really really bad idea.

“Shhhh. Calm down Oni,” said Johnny, “Everything is going to be all right. We found you, and that’s all that matters. Shhhh. Calm down. Don’t you know it’s gonna be all right...all right...all right...

“Thank you Johnny,” said Oni, wiping tears from her eyes, “It’s really great to be back.

“And it’s overwhelming to have you back.”

Oni finally settles down and the four band members have a group hug. They all sit down in the booth and discuss their lives, each one telling what they have been doing for the past two years, why Johnny decided to do this, and basically how the whole adventure happened. The conversation pauses for a few moments and Mairi asked a crucial question:

“What about Alistair?”

Oni jumps at the question and said, “Oh my God! I was so excited when I saw you guys that I completely forgot about Alistair! He and I have been performing at the café weekly!” Oni runs frantically behind stage, a few minutes go by, and Oni returns to the booth. With Alistair. Albatross Antics is whole once more.

