

Still Flyin'

More surprising than a bunch of indie-rockers coming together to form a reggae band is the fact that the product is actually really good. San Francisco's Still Flyin' is a true indie-rock supergroup, led by former Masters Of The Hemisphere member Sean Rawls and featuring people who have played in bands like The Aislors Set, The Ladybug Transistor, Track Star, and Architecture In Helsinki. Still Flyin' recently released *Za Cloud*, its second EP-size EJ—as in, “extended jam”—on local label Antenna Farm Records. *The A.V. Club* spoke with Rawls about making reggae without knowing much about it, and how fun and frustrating the whole process has been.

The A.V. Club: Still Flyin' was formed pretty soon after you moved to San Francisco in 2004. How did it come together?

Sean Rawls: Before I moved from Athens, I had started playing with this other band, Je Suis France, and I made up a song in that band—a reggae, kind of joke-y song called “Never Gonna Touch The Ground.” When I moved out to San Francisco, I recorded that song for them to use when they were taking the stage during one of their shows. I recorded it with Wyatt [Cusick] and Alicia [Vanden Heuvel]—they used to play in The Aislors Set—and they were so into the song that we started talking about forming a band to start playing songs like that. So I started asking everybody I knew to join my band that's playing this reggae kind of stuff. It was kind of a joke at first, and everybody said yes—I think half the people didn't even think I was serious. So I finally decided to have a practice, and there were tons of people there. It's become, to our surprise, an actual semi-serious band that goes on tour sometimes and records.

AVC: How many people are considered official members?

SR: There's a core lineup that's about 15 or 16 people—they're the ones that if we record something, they'll fly in or whatever. Most of them live in the Bay Area, but one lives in New York and two live in San Diego. But then there are also all these other people who used to live in San Francisco and



have since moved—they'll meet us for a tour, or if they're in town and we have a show, they'll play with us. We call those our “spiritual members,” and there are probably at least 20 or 25 of those people. Once you're in Still Flyin', you can never get out, no matter how hard you try.

AVC: Trying to play live and record with this many people—is it a big mess sometimes?

SR: Yeah, definitely. It's kind of the best and the worst part. It's such a big party whenever we do anything—it's the most fun I've ever had playing music, because I'm with all my friends and we're having such a good time. But it's also the worst part, trying to schedule a practice or something, because we've never had a practice where every single person was there. Usually I'll try to have a practice and there will only be seven people there or something, and then people start saying, “Where's so-and-so at, how come they never come to practice?” It's just this big mess, this big hassle. But then when we play shows or go on tour or whatever, everybody realizes why we do it, so it all becomes worth it.

AVC: Prior to writing “Never Gonna Touch The Ground,” had you ever played reggae? Or was this something you just stumbled upon?

SR: [Laughs.] It just happened as sort of a joke. We just thought it was funny. I liked reggae, but I didn't really know anything about it. Other people who heard the song, they thought it was funny, too. Nobody really knew that much about reggae. And then once the band started, we started getting more and more into reggae, and then I realized that I didn't even like a lot of reggae. I mainly just like rocksteady, and pretty much *The Harder They Come* soundtrack—that's kind of all I need. I'm definitely not an aficionado or anything. We call ourselves a party band, instead

of a reggae band, but there's definitely the reggae influence there in the music.

AVC: Did you ever think that as a bunch of mostly white indie-rockers you weren't allowed to play this kind of music?

SR: [Laughs.] We never thought whether we're allowed to play it. But we have thought that if people hear about Still Flyin' but they've never actually heard us or seen us, and they just hear we're a bunch of indie kids playing reggae music, I think that gives them a picture of us, of what we sound like, that isn't really true. You know, we don't sound anything like Steel Pulse or Burning Spear or something. We don't refer to ourselves as a

reggae band, but it's okay if people do.

AVC: The new record has a song called “Fuck The Stress”—is that one of the band's themes?

SR: Yes, that's kind of our manifesto, that song right there. It's really slow, so we don't play it that much live. But that's the one that seems to resonate with a lot of people, and that's really the point of the whole band, that song.

AVC: What does the future hold?

SR: This new EP, they're actually older songs than the first EP—the new songs that we have are moving in a different direction, so we wanted to get these old songs recorded and out before we moved into the new territory. As soon as we can get all the new songs honed to perfection, we'll record our first album. We're going to go on tour in September, a short East Coast tour, and then hopefully right after that we'll record an album. We're all really excited about the new songs. They sound a little bit different, but it still sounds like Still Flyin'. I guess you could say it sounds less reggae now, and more kind of rhythmic and dance-y. —Marc Hawthorne

Still Flyin' performs with Architecture In Helsinki and Yacht on June 16 at Bimbo's 365 Club at 9 p.m. Tickets are \$16 and the show is 21+.