

OZOMATLI * DON'T MESS WITH THE DRAGON

Welcome to Ozomatli. Version 12.0.

Rested, revived, and ready for the next level.

On the surface, nothing's changed. There's the same core line-up, the same oppositional politics, the same live shows that erupt into drum-line blessed community parties, and the same devotion to polyglot urban sound clashing. But here's what's new: after 12 years of collaborative song-writing, 12 years of constant touring everywhere from Denver to Tokyo to Sydney, 12 years of supporting anti-war mobilizations and global human rights movements, 12 years of pioneering Spanish-English mash-ups of hip hop, salsa, cumbia, dub, and Middle Eastern funk, and most importantly, 12 years of facing up to internal battles and personal struggles, they've emerged anew with their fourth full-length studio album, *Don't Mess With The Dragon*, the band's most cohesive, polished, and joyous record to date.

"There is more of a sense of personal responsibility on this one," says bassist Wil-Dog Abers. "All of us are on this road of being more responsible in our own lives, becoming happier human beings, healthier in our lives outside of the band. In the process of making the record, people were really deep in the process of getting their lives together. It made a big difference. People growing up, people taking care of their own lives. The healthier people get, the better the music gets."

Don't Mess With The Dragon was written and recorded with a firm commitment to collective creation. They began writing and experimenting with songs in informal sessions in the fall of 2005 at a local Los Angeles Latino art gallery, Tropic de Nopal. Then came recording sessions in the legendary Fantasy studios in Northern California, followed by sessions at a slew of prime LA recording houses.

"It's always a struggle to be creative together, as a unit, but this was by far our best time in the studio together," says percussionist Jiro Yamaguchi. "It takes maturity to work together and we are all getting better at communicating. "In the past, we would be like, this song is a Raul song, this song is an Asdrú song, and this song is a Justin song. There wasn't much room for interplay. On this record, we have more interplay; all the characters work together into a whole book instead of just being in a bunch of short stories says Wil Dog."

Much of the band's renewed sense of musical collaboration comes from their relationship with their label, venerable jazz and Latin stalwarts Concord Records. *Don't Mess With The Dragon* is Ozo's second full length, studio offering for Concord — their longest stay with a single label.

"We've usually been a one record one label band," says Yamaguchi. "Being on Concord for a second record has given us a sense of stability we've never had. They show us a lot of love and don't breathe over our shoulders in the creative process."

Ozomatli views *Don't Mess With The Dragon* as their first true collection of songs, where the emphasis is on melody, structure, and feeling as much as on the genre-crossing stylistic experiments that fans have come to expect. Which isn't to say that their flair for the unexpected has been lost. "After Party" pays homage to old-school Chicano R&B (with help from keyboard whiz Money Mark), "Don't Mess With The Dragon" throws Lin Cheng's erhu playing into a Dirty South meringue chant, "When I Close My Eyes" nods back to Fishbone and Oingo Boingo, and "La Segunda Mano," which features the vocals of Quetzal's Martha

Gonzales, blends son jarocho with hip hop to create what Bella calls “the sound of Afrika Bambattaa at a fandango.”

There’s also “City of Angels,” the ultimate Los Angeles valentine from the city’s most beloved musical sons. “We wanted to celebrate Los Angeles but on the street level,” says Wil-Dog. “You always hear Randy Newman’s song, which is cool, but we thought it was time for a new one. Ours mentions Figueroa and South L.A.”

The band’s dedication to addressing social justice issues—a hallmark of Ozomatli’s work ever since the band formed in 1995 as part of a local labor protest—continues on *Don’t Mess With The Dragon*. The blazing “Temperatura” was inspired by the May 2006 pro-immigration marches (“We wanted people to take it to the streets and turn up the heat,” says Wil-Dog) and “Magnolia Soul” rebukes the Bush administration for their lack of Katrina relief.

“The whole album is really a statement of just how much we want to take Ozo to the next level in terms of music and artistry,” says Bella. “We paid our dues. We toured our asses off. After twelve years, we’re really ready to present the world with what we believe in.”

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Ozomatli are:

Ulises Bella, Tenor Sax, Clarinet, Vocals

Wil-Dog Abers, Bass, Vocals

Raul Pacheco, Guitar, Lead Vocals

Justin Porée, Percussion, MC, vocals

Asdrú Sierra, Trumpet, Lead Vocals

Jiro Yamaguchi, Percussion

Jabu Smith-Freeman, MC

Mario Calire, Drums

Shel Bruton, Trombone