

# Ohbijou

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Borne in the bedrooms of a family home in Brantford, Ontario, Casey Mecija's tender compositions, bound with youthful frailty and unnerving beauty, found their pace in Toronto. Enlisting the help of her younger sister, Jenny, and friends Heather Kirby and Anissa Hart, Mecija's songs took flight. An encounter with James Bunton and Ryan Carley led to further collaboration and the conception of Ohbijou. Andrew Kinoshita soon added his talents to Ohbijou's orchestration. Furnished with mandolin, violin, piano, banjo, cello and an impressive array of other instruments, a seven piece orchestral pop force began to appear on stages around Toronto. In June of 2005 Ohbijou released *Zips and Zings*, an EP that announced the arrival of a band that would deeply alter the landscape of independent music in Toronto. The 2006 release of their first full-length album, *Swift Feet for Troubling Times*, garnered high praise from critics, led the band across both Canada and the United States, and was catalyst for numerous sold-out performances.

Ohbijou has a healthy preoccupation with the movements and events that coincide with the creation of their music. Mecija pens songs wrought with the romantic afflictions of big city life. She sutures the intimate details of her personal relations to the macrocosmic relations of her city; her lyrics eulogize the streets and neighborhoods of a changing city, and the humbling encounters that happen because of and in spite of these changes. Dressed with intricate melodies and vocal harmonies arranged by her bandmates, the songs reveal a striking musicality and virtuosity. A string of accolades has followed Ohbijou since its inception, and they have quietly amassed a devoted and varied army of fans. Ohbijou's delicate sound increasingly matures with each recording.

Despite acquiring such praise, each performance and recording is tempered with gestures to other musicians and other initiatives, deflecting attention away from the band itself and back onto the audience from which the band draws strength. With a pointed self-reflexivity and humility, Ohbijou crafts lyrics and melodies that pay homage to those to whom their sound is indebted.

To speak of Ohbijou as strictly a band is not really accurate. They defy the limits of such, and are at once friends, a curatorial movement, familial unit, assembly of musicians, and philanthropic initiative. At times Ohbijou is synonymous with "Bellwoods" - the moniker given to a cooperative house in which two members of the band live, and in which all members and dozens of friends make and share music. The spirit of the house calcifies in concerts that take place in its basement and projects such as "Friends in Bellwoods", a compilation CD curated by James Bunton and Casey Mecija that showcases some of the acts that have played in the house. Defined as a "digital diary of the house", to date the original compilation has raised over \$11,000 for the Daily Bread Food Bank of Toronto. A second "Bellwoods" compilation will be released in August, 2009.

Ohbijou now returns with their highly anticipated sophomore album, *Beacons*. The record gleaned early praise from critics and was touted as one of 2009's most anticipated albums. The band has inked deals with Bella Union in Europe (also home to Fleet Foxes, Midlake, Andrew Bird, etc.) and Last Gang Records

in North America (New Pornographers, Metric, Crystal Castles, etc.). Over the next year, Ohbijou will grace international stages, touring their sound to new audiences.

~ written by Hannah Dyer