

In the charmed world of THE APPLES IN STEREO's ROBERT SCHNEIDER, music and mathematics are the principal creative outlets. Although these subjects are inextricably linked, New Magnetic Wonder represents the first time Schneider's imagination has seamlessly integrated them on an Apples album. New Magnetic Wonder marks the Apples' first release in five years, as well as their fifth official full-length album. The album also marks the first release on ELIJAH WOOD's newly formed label Simian Records (co-released by Yep Roc Records and co-distributed by Elephant 6/Redeye Distribution). Apples lead singer Robert Schneider met Wood at SXSW music festival in Austin, TX in 2003. As fate would have it, the Apples, who recently departed from their long-time label spinART, were looking for a new label at exactly the same time Wood was launching Simian Records.

True to their Elephant 6 roots, the album features an array of special guests including many members of the Elephant 6 collective. Sticking with their indie-rock pedigree the Apples sought the production skills of acclaimed engineer BRYCE GOGGIN (Pavement, Sebadoh, Phish, Sean Lennon), who mixed their last album Velocity of Sound. The idea of working with Goggin was once again, according to Schneider, a perfect fit. Schneider felt at home amid Goggin's laid-back wizardry, wielded in his studio full of vintage gear with no separate control room. On New Magnetic Wonder, Goggin and Schneider together massaged the vortex between lush orchestration and an indie rock sparseness all the while understanding the Apples' collective unconscious, infused by influences as diverse as ELO, Pavement, and the Beach Boys.

New Magnetic Wonder is far and away the most elaborate Apples production the Apples have completed to date. Recorded in five cities (Brooklyn, NY; Lexington, NY; Denver, CO; Athens, GA; and Benton, KY) over 12 months, the recording and completion of New Magnetic Wonder spanned great change within the band (which includes bass player ERIC ALLEN and guitarist JOHN HILL). New Magnetic Wonder led Schneider through a labyrinth of new directions, including the recent departure of the band's longtime drummer and second vocalist, Hilarie Sidney, to focus on her own band The High Water Marks, as well as Schneider's invention of a new musical scale.

New Magnetic Wonder is an ambitious LP clocking in at 53 minutes containing 14 songs and 12 additional musical segue-ways (or 'link tracks' as Schneider refers to them). In fact, at several points during the making of the album, Goggin had trouble keeping his Pro-tools recording system functioning. Schneider's use of 96 tracks of instrumentation on some songs, including the pop hit "Same Old Drag," was not only a record number of tracks for Goggin and his studio, but was also so densely layered with overdubs, that it caused his computer processor to crash repeatedly. And, this was only the tip of the iceberg in terms of technical challenges for the album. Another major challenge was New Magnetic Wonder's magnum opus "Beautiful Machine" which uniquely marries four distinct sounding songs. Schneider, in a lengthy and incredibly subtle process of production and mixing, was able to turn these tracks into an almost eight minute suite— the indie rock equivalent of a grand classical concerto. "Beautiful Machine" was such a difficult song to complete, that it not only threatened Schneider's tenuous sanity but it also threatened the album's very completion.

"Finishing this record took every joule of energy I had," quips Schneider in his typical effervescent and rapid-fire manner. "There were so many different sounds and ideas bouncing around in my head, and such strong feelings to get across. With Velocity of Sound, I returned to the rawness of our live shows and the fuzzy vibe of our early four-track recordings. This time I wanted to make a record that really meant something, that felt life affirming and real, yet ultra hi-fi and unreal at the same time. Apparently that kind of record is not technically feasible."

For all of this talk of high fidelity and lofty logic, Schneider was not married to the idea that more is more. "One-half of 'Sun Is Out' was recorded on a handheld cassette recorder," he reflects, "And the basic track of the other half was recorded live into a single microphone just the way we used to do it in high school. Then we added 10 tracks of us laughing and singing and just goofing off." Overall, a constant stream of ideas and undying enthusiasm kept Schneider abreast throughout this project, and can be found in every delicately chiseled part of this album. Schneider particularly reveled in using studio gems found in Goggin's treasure trove of vintage gear, including a grand piano, a vintage vocoder, and Paul McCartney's tape machine from McCartney 2.

New Magnetic Wonder contains such fist pumping anthems as "Can You Feel It?," the 70's AM radio-esque "Same Old Drag," the slice of infectious Vocoder heaven "Joanie Don't U Worry" (a 'link track' throwback to the 'Computer Love' of the late 80s/early 90s), and the Mellotron majesty of "Energy." This is perfect music for Jeff Lynne and Brian Wilson to make-out to.

Schneider's Production style (most noted on Neutral Milk Hotel's In The Aeroplane Over The Sea) is known for breaking new recording ground. True to form, New Magnetic Wonder includes another Schneider first, the newly invented "Non-Pythagorean Music Scale" as the enhanced portion of this multimedia CD release, which includes digital sound files for MIDI usage and an in-depth description both in document and video form. Through elegant mathematical equations based on the properties of natural logarithms, Schneider was able to replace the standard twelve tones in a musical octave with a completely new set of frequencies, which Schneider says "Add according to a different algebra from the traditional, rational pitches. Music theory in this scale has not yet been worked out." Not only are the Apples taking a revolutionary step in providing this scale in a form that invites fans to invent new chords and songs and proliferate it amongst friends, but the first compositions created with this scale are incorporated as link tracks on New Magnetic Wonder, including the "Non-Pythagorean Chord" which opens the album.

Schneider's two creative muses have melded seamlessly and with New Magnetic Wonder The Apples triumphantly return to indie-rock's hierarchal throne.