



Unafraid of Getting Greasy:

Hot Buttered Rum Runs on Bluegrass Fusion & Recycled Vegetable Oil

by Gene Armstrong (*Tuscon Weekly*)

Although he wasn't a member at the time, Hot Buttered Rum's Aaron Redner says the bluegrass-fusion band, for which he plays fiddle and mandolin, burst into existence on a camping trip.

"The big bang of this group was a backpacking trip that took place several years ago," says Redner, who joined the group around 2002. "People just brought their instruments and went backpacking and hiking together for about a month in the high Sierra mountains. They'd just stop along the way and play for hikers who were passing by."

The music of Hot Buttered Rum "was meant from the beginning to be totally music from and for the heart, and music inspired by nature," Redner says by phone from his home in the San Francisco area.

Hot Buttered Rum will play Tuesday night, Dec. 6, at Plush. Redner says he and his bandmates have enjoyed playing in Tempe and Flagstaff on a few occasions, but this will mark their first visit to Southern Arizona.

Based in the Bay area, the all-acoustic quintet plays what is ostensibly bluegrass but includes threads of rock, jazz, blues, old-time folk, country, Western, swing and Celtic music, among other styles.

"People who don't really know music think of us just as a bluegrass or a country folk band. We play instruments that are often associated with bluegrass, but we're a band that plays music that blurs the lines."

In addition to Redner, Hot Buttered Rum includes double bassist Bryan Horne; Erik Yates on banjo, flute, clarinet and accordion; guitarist Nat Keefe; and Matt Butler on drums. They range in age from 27 to 34.

Among the band members' other listening interests are traditional Indian music, Western classical music, West African drumming, art rock and new wave of the '80s and the Grateful Dead.

"Roots music is not just from this country, but from the roots of every country," says Redner. "When I get home myself, I find myself channel surfing the more poppy stations so I can keep up on what's going on in popular music and Top 40, too."

Catholic tastes feed the band's hunger for new sounds.

"There are so many other kinds of music that we enjoy, and everybody sings, and everyone contributes to the writing process. So when you bring a song to the table, it's so exciting to see it develop through the different lenses."

The songs run the gamut, including tributes to nature ("Idaho Pines"), romantic ruminations ("Summertime Gal"), warm portraits of family ("Jack Mormon Mom") and whimsical odes to near beer ("Three Point Two") and chewing tobacco ("Copenhagen"), not to mention topical and potentially controversial musings such as "John Walker Lindh."

"Most of our music is original," Redner notes. "But we're all children of the '70s and '80s, so our sets always have a few choice covers."

Some of those have included The Beatles' "Norwegian Wood," Paul Simon's "Gumboots," Leo Sayer's "You Make Me Feel Like Dancin'" and the themes from the TV shows *The Brady Bunch* and *The Dukes of Hazzard*. Another popular cover is "Lochs of Dread," Béla Fleck's funky-reggae take on Scottish folk music.

Of course, with its influences, Hot Buttered Rum can't help but play old-time breakdowns and jazzy jams, such as the traditional set centerpiece "Evolution," which often extends past the 10-minute mark.

"The fact is that Hot Buttered Rum plays a very nonoffensive music and (is) very danceable. We already are attracting people of all ages at our shows. I grew up in the jam-band scene, and there was too much consistency in the age of the audiences. At our shows, you can see grandparents bringing their grandchildren."

This year has been good to Hot Buttered Rum. The band has performed at the Telluride Bluegrass Festival, the Newport Folk Festival and the South by Southwest Music and Media Conference.

In keeping with its jam band heritage, Hot Buttered Rum encourages the taping of concerts and the trading of its music. In fact, many of its full sets are available in streaming audio or for download from the Internet.

Because the band isn't a platinum-selling act on a major label, tapers and tape traders aren't a threat. Says Redner, "The fans appreciate it, and you'll notice that a lot of the tapers are distributing the music, so they all work together to get the music out there."

To date, Hot Buttered Rum has released two official CDs: *Live at the Freight and Salvage* in 2002, and *In These Parts* in 2004.

Recording just finished on a third. Produced by "new grass" mandolin player Mike Marshall and featuring guest appearances by fiddler Darol Anger and guitarist-singer Peter Rowan, it'll be released soon after the first of the year, according to Redner.

The new album's title will be *Well Oiled Machine*, which not only refers to the efficacy of the band, but to its vegetable-oil-powered tour bus. Playing some 175 dates a year, the band spends a lot of time on the road, much of it spent running its diesel bus on veggie oil.

"If we drive more than 6,000 miles a year, at least half of that is on veggie oil. We get the used oil from restaurant Dumpsters. When we're on the road, we check out the oil quality at the restaurants we hit. And if the management says it's OK, we have these two 120-gallon drums that we fill right up."

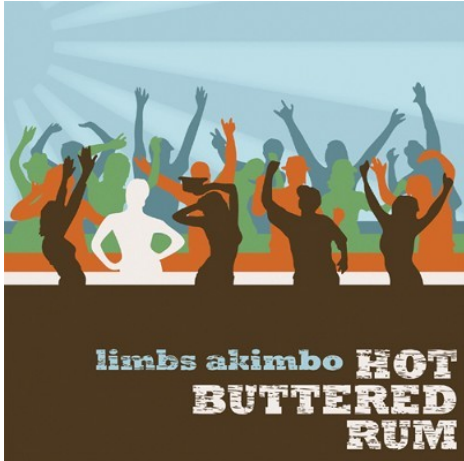
This saves the band tens of thousands of dollars a year in fuel bills, Redner reports.

He says that notable kings of the road such as Neil Young, Bonnie Raitt, Willie Nelson and Jack Johnson all ride in tour buses that use some combination of diesel and veggie oil.

He adds that sometimes it seems as if the band is becoming as popular for its promotion of the use of alternate fuels as it is for its music. "Literally, we have dozens of bands come up to us on the road, asking, 'How can we do this?'"

No big deal, says the fiddler. With a few slight modifications in regards to filtration and heating, any diesel engine can run on recycled veggie oil.

"It's still a little bit in the development stages. You need to be willing to get a little greasy. We're trying to get around the idea that it is just some sort of hippie alternative trip, and bring it to the masses."



Hot Buttered Rum: *Limbs Akimbo*

By Dennis Cook (JamBase.com)

With an assured hop, Hot Buttered Rum's latest hooks an arm around you with an "away we go" gusto. There's a lover's energy to *Limbs Akimbo* (released September 8) that exudes passionate engagement with the craft of music making. These are folks simply in thrall to the idea of writing wonderful songs – the sort of humanizing ditties that get us through, actually – and playing them with joy, sophistication and a palpable reach that stretches inward and outward. Once tagged a newgrass act, HBR neatly sidesteps expectations here, advancing with arms and minds open wide.

Always a likeable bunch, Butter amps up their charm quotient significantly with spot-on party starters "Beneath The Blossoms" and "Two Loose Cannons," rolling with confident swagger to new-ish drummer Matt Butler (Everyone Orchestra), who resides in the muscular of these tunes without needing to flex unduly, lifting and pulling without overpowering the delicacies inherent to HBR's string core. While some fans of the band's pre-drum sound have expressed hesitancy about Butler's addition, these ears find nothing but good in his presence, which actually frees up some of the most carefree, flavorful playing ever from the others. With some of the rhythm concerns off their backs, Erik Yates (vocals, banjo, flute, sax, resophonic guitar), Nat Keefe (vocals, guitar), Aaron Redner (vocals, fiddle, mandolin) and even bassist Bryan Horne simply fly on their instruments, loosened up by the shift in perspective and ready for adventure.

The songwriting throughout is their best to date. Each piece feels honed (but not too honed), smooth as river rocks worked gently, shaped by time and shifting tides. There's still a few solid yucks ("Sexy Bakery Girl," "Honkeytonk Tequila") but there's pleasant bittersweetness creeping into the verses. As the rings gather around their trunk, HBR has grown more solid, more enduring in character, and wistful airs like "Something New" and "Queen Elizabeth" exhibit positive maturity, with "Elizabeth" sounding like Dylan on a good day in 1975 and "Something New" capturing some of Jackson Browne's tough melancholy. This growth extends to the interwoven playing of the ensemble and winning guests like Jackie Greene, Zach Gill (ALO), Nicki Bluhm, percussionist Perry Sayoma Quarshie and The Mother Hips' Tim Bluhm, who produced *Limbs Akimbo* with an unobtrusive, musician sensitive ear that presents a nuanced crystallization of Hot Buttered Rum at their best.

And there's the matter of the last two tracks, "Summertime Gal" and "Limbs Akimbo," which introduce a whole new sonic palette to their studio side. "Gal" condenses the band's uncanny ability to mix twang with trippiness in concert, a psychedelic bent that harks back to largely unheralded innovators Goose Creek Symphony. When "Summertime Gal" opens up a few minutes in, unleashing seriously funky bass and a collective chatter that'll make you strut like Travolta getting ready on a Saturday night, it's almost enough to make you forget where the song started, and when it comes back around again one can't help but be impressed. Closing with the sprightly, African scented title cut, a Nat Keefe/Zach Gill co-write, cleanly puts the kibosh on Hot Buttered being a bluegrass unit once and for all. Yes, mountain music and what Flatt & Scruggs wrought is in the mix but their musical minds leap continents now, freely grabbing bits of Brazilian Tropicalismo and Ghanaian highlife as easily as they snatch the cash off the barrelhead. As the title tune celebrates, this is a chance to grow and this band is shooting up like a happy weed in bright sunlight.

Hot Buttered Rum: *Well-Oiled Machine*

by Tyler Blue (*Santa Barbara Independent*)

“Hot Diggity!” I say after hearing Hot Buttered Rum’s *Well-Oiled Machine*. Setting a new standard for the evolved bluegrass genre, the Bay Area quintet has achieved an album of irresistible charm. Basking in a warmth often elusive in the studio, the listener feels cradled within the band’s timeless world. Weaving a web of pristine instrumental excursions with lush vocal harmonies, this machine is well oiled indeed. They ignite things from the get-go with the politically charged swing of “Guns or Butter.” The mythical voyage of “Waterpocket Fold” finds the fellows playing a game of string-laden pinball. While “Sweet Honey Fountain” might as well be an invitation to dive into Hot Buttered’s bubbling well of musical nectar.



Well-Oiled Machine by Hot Buttered Rum

by Shane Handler (*Glide Magazine*)

Even though they're better known for their touring vehicle – a converted bus powered by recycled vegetable oil and biodiesel – and recently dropped the “String Band” from their moniker, there's no hiding who Hot Buttered Rum really are. With their aptly titled second full length studio album, *Well-Oiled Machine*, the roots-grass band goes where fellow pickers like Yonder Mountain String Band have ventured before, successfully churning acoustic bluegrass with folk.

Produced by Mike Marshall, *Well-Oiled Machine* features guest spots from veterans Darol Anger, Peter Rowan, and Marshall himself. And rather than throwing in the typical “Blackberry Blossom” cover like every other bluegrass album, Hot Buttered Rum offer a collection of eleven ambitious originals. The results are undoubtedly earthy and heady, but the pure picking – courtesy of banjo, mandolin, fiddle, and acoustic guitar – grace a sense of maturity.

“Poison Oak,” which floats like an Old & The Way classic, “Guns or Butter,” which stirs with a sermon chorus, and the soulful “Waiting for a Squall” are true standout tracks. The vocals are genuine and the lyrics tender, but they'll need another ten years of heartache and hard livin' to give their sound a needed “McCoury” howl. Then again, touring mountain roads in that old bus should give them plenty of early gray hairs.

Hot Buttered Rum: Rum Goes Green

by Jenny Seifert (*Glide Magazine*)



What do you get when you mix bluegrass, butter, and biofuel? Hot Buttered Rum – a band that blends traditional Americana music with modern musical influences and a shot of progressivism. As pioneers of the music industry’s biofuel revolution and lyricists of social and environmental change, they are among the growing cadre of artists who are holding a microphone for the Earth.

Music is certainly no stranger to social movements. In the civil rights and the 1960s antiwar movements, for example, music helped to unite the oppressed with what sociologist Emile Durkheim called a “collective identity” and provided an artistic channel through which to express a call for revolution. In the sustainability, or “green,” movement, arguably one of the largest social movements of our time,

music is playing a similar tune. However, finding harmony is not easy to achieve.

“There is an inherent dichotomy between music and the green movement, where the practice of touring is at odds with the environmental message,” said Lauren Hatfield, Lifestyle Experience Manager of Clif Bar. “There is a need for musicians’ practices to coexist with their message.” Hatfield leads the Clif GreenNotes program, which works with bands, including HBR, to lessen the environmental impact of touring and spread the good green word.

When asked at their recent show in Portland, OR what a tour with a net-zero environmental impact would look like, HBR’s banjo player Erik Yates chortled, “Holographic concerts.”

HBR makes significant efforts to find harmony between their touring practices and their environmental mission. These efforts include running their touring bus on biofuel, partnering with organizations such as Clif Bar and Rock the Earth on education and outreach initiatives, creating a Biofuels Learning and Resource Center on their website, and, most recently, stopping the use of disposable plastic water bottles during shows.

“As a band, part of our measure of success is if we’ve been able to do what we want to do in a way that minimizes our own impact but also promotes others taking that into consideration as well,” said Yates.

According to Hatfield, musicians are in a unique position to encourage positive social change. “Artists have the power to share information in a way that scientists and politicians can’t. By addressing the issues in an environment that is relaxed and positive, they are given an influential voice that fans respect.”

Aside from the difficult dichotomy of “green” touring, Yates and band mate Nat Keefe recognize other nuances in the tune that music is playing in the green movement.

“The green movement is a much bigger and more diversified movement [than the movements of the 1960s],” said Keefe. “We don’t have a singular Bob Dylan or Joan Baez at the forefront leading the way for a whole generation.”

With artists from legend Willie Nelson to feminist icon Ani DiFranco joining HBR on the metaphorical stage, there is certainly a variegated chorus of voices singing out for positive change.

Also, the message of this chorus’ songs strays in direction from that of previous social movements. While the socio-political songs of the 60s had potent lyrics of dissent and indignation that demanded the system be torn down, such as Bob Dylan’s “Masters of War,” the songs of the green movement provide the more hopeful message of working to build up a better future.

“You have to figure out a way to not only cry out, but to also fix the problem,” said Yates. “‘Masters of War’ is the kind of song that wouldn’t make as much sense nowadays, because you’d have to offer, along with your indictment of the people, some other way to go.”

Yates and Keefe cited their tune “Guns or Butter” as an example of a song that calls for people to get involved. In fact, the band has compiled a collection of songs on their website, appropriately entitled “Green Tunes,” that

tackle social, political and environmental issues and promote change.

“We need to inspire people more than scare them; we have to encourage people to do what they can,” said Yates. Avoiding the doom and gloom of the issues featured in their songs is vital to HBR’s music and message.

“Doom and gloom are a lot less fun to sing about,” said Keefe. “As artists, we go after artistic truths – about love or about the world and the way it works. If we can express something that reverberates with ourselves and with other people, then we’ve done our job.”

Creating a unifying feeling, rather than coercing people to think a certain way, is how HBR views their role as musicians in the movement. Through their live shows, Yates and Keefe claim they enable people to lose themselves in something bigger and help them find relief from the problems that exist outside the venue doors.

“When people come to our shows, they’re experiencing a confluence of philosophy and a heart-based approach,” said Yates, who equated live music to a secular church in which people can commune and become more open to positive contribution. “People are looking for a place where the heart matters more than the head. This helps to open up their willingness, desire and drive to be better stewards.”

Just as importantly, they’re trying to put the fun in social change.

“Environmental change has to be fun,” said Keefe, recalling his participation in the 1999 WTO protest in Seattle, where he was captivated by the event’s street circus, parades and costumes. “The public spectacle was inspiring to me; it was a light bulb moment. I thought, oh this is what the environmental movement is going to look like.”

Through both their music and their practices, HBR’s message has reached fans and musical peers alike. Yates and Keefe said they’ve received emails from numerous fans and know of several bands that credit the band for their conversion to biofuel.

“We’re here to serve our community, to provide a place of love and fun, and to create a space to exchange ideas for a group of people that spread across the country,” said Keefe. “In the end, if we’re going to use resources on something, live music is a good use of them. There are much less productive things for humanity.”



The Biodiesel Band Bus

by Kate Slomkowski (*E: The Environmental Magazine*)

Zachary Matthews, who sings and plays mandolin and fiddle with the Hot Buttered Rum String Band, fondly recalls how he and his band mates met...on a backpacking trip. The call of the wild brought them together, and it keeps them together. The environmentally conscious band tries to leave an impact on its fans, and not solely on the road that passes beneath its bus tires as it travels from coast to coast.

While researching alternative fuels, the band heard about the biodiesel option from the Ecology Center in Berkeley, California. The group attended workshops and learned how to run its diesel bus on vegetable oil; the "Bio Bus" hit the road in the summer of 2003 and has since logged more than 50,000 miles.

Veggie buses are cool these days. Top players with biodiesel bus conversions include Neil Young, Dave Matthews and Jack Johnson. "One of my pet projects is to run the next Greendale tour on biodiesel," said Young in *Wired* last year. "It gives off 80 percent less emissions. If we travel with a giant thermos-bottle truck with 'biofuel' written on the side, the TV people will come, and then I'll be able to prostitute myself for something positive, instead of just selling a record."

Dedicated "grease" user and singer-songwriter Jaia Suri converted her Ford 350 to pure biodiesel and personally thanks restaurant owners on the road for allowing access to their used fryer oil.

With both gas prices and global warming concerns on the rise, interest in renewable fuels like biodiesel—which in one common form is 20 percent vegetable oil, 80 percent petroleum diesel fuel—is increasing. According to the National Biodiesel Board, the blends can be used in any existing diesel engine with very little impact on the vehicle's operating performance.

To run vegetable oil, diesel vehicles need a \$1,000 kit available from several manufacturers. Biodiesel fuel eliminates carcinogenic sulfur emissions and reduces most major exhaust pollutants, particulate matter and the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide. Biodiesel even smells better than gasoline: many say they catch a whiff of French fries.

Zac Matthews says the group bought its first biodiesel vehicle on eBay in 2003. "This school bus was the famous Project BioBus converted to run on veggie oil by 13 students of Middlebury College in Vermont," he says, adding that the group parks the bus in front of the evening's venue and after the show offers demonstrations on how the bus works. Matthews feels it's important to encourage others to convert their own vehicles.

One of the most enthusiastic supporters of biodiesel is singer Willie Nelson, who helped found The Willie Nelson Biodiesel Company partnership last year. The company's fuel, "BioWillie," is mostly made from soybeans and can be burned without modification in any diesel engine. Nelson says the fuel reduces the need for imported oil and helps one of his favorite causes—American farmers—at the same time.

Live Review: Hot Buttered Rum at the Boulder Theater

by Nathan Rist (*Denver Post*)

How often do you go to a concert and hug people, or visit a venue where you feel you're part of a family? Such was my experience at the April 9 Hot Buttered Rum show at the Boulder Theater. A large part of the front row were the type that go to as many shows as they can, and one of my new friends (whom I met that night with the aforementioned hug), claimed he'd seen probably 50 of the band's shows.

Furthermore, despite having seen HBR's previous two shows in Aspen and Breckenridge, my new friend was also planning on seeing HBR at the Ogden the following night. So the reason those people greeted each other as old friends was because they were. Everyone in the core group had seen at least one other HBR show with other people in the group. Generally, you don't see patrons bring cupcakes to a show to hand them mid-set to celebrate another patron's birthday.

Musically, Hot Buttered Rum brought their young energy to bluegrass in a way that's comparable to Yonder Mountain String Band. They're always happy to debut new material to their devout followers and switch up their setlist night after night — the live jukebox aspect of some pop acts. Del McCoury's son lead opens the Travelin' McCourys, a classic bluegrass band that tours while Del takes some well deserved down time.



The Reinvention of Hot Buttered Rum

by Scott Bernstein (*Hidden Track*)

For a band to last the better part of a decade represents a momentous feat. To put it in perspective, think about where you were in your life about eight years ago. Unless you are Wooderson from Dazed and Confused, odds are things looked a lot different back then than they do today.

For a band like Hot Buttered Rum to push on through for eight more years, it is only natural that they would feel the need to shift things up to keep it fresh. With the release of their new album, *Limbs Akimbo*, we see the culmination of this freshness come across ten fold, as this is not simply a collection of new tunes, but a reinvention of sorts. With this album, the band puts forth sweeping changes.

In chatting with Erik Yates, the man behind the barn-burning banjo and guitar picking as well as those signature HBR woodwind accents, he made it clear that this is simply to be considered an “evolution” rather than a true change in direction. Still, there is certainly a lot to take note of and good reason to renew interest in what Hot Buttered Rum is doing.

For starters, they added a drummer in Matt Butler, which for a band primarily known as a bluegrass string band presents a bold sonic transition. While pure bluegrass bands tend to avoid drums with the bass and other stringed instruments providing a chugging rhythm of their own, it is immediately clear how much Butler opens things up for Hot Buttered Rum. While it does move the band away from the more traditional bluegrass sound, this was totally by design; remember the omission of “String Band” in the band name many moons ago? What this does, in effect, is free up space whereby the instruments can play less, as that need to fill all that space with the string instruments dissipates. The result becomes a much more song-based approach.



“Every change in Hot Buttered Rum’s development has happened in the usual loping kind of way that most of life seems to unfold in when you just let it. Having drums definitely changes our relationship to every kind of music we play. This includes bluegrass, Irish-influenced material, rock, folk, everything. We have always played songs from these worlds, but, with the possible exception of the bluegrass material, having a drummer instead of a mandolinist makes them more stylistically recognizable.”

“I do not think of this as good or bad, but it has been a real shift for us. We’re all used to being drummers, saying things like “the guitar strum is the ride cymbal here,” or “the banjo’s got the backbeat.” Now that that ride cymbal is there, and that backbeat is always covered, we’re finding other ways to use our acoustic instruments. It’s also really changed our relationship to performing as singers – whoever’s singing lead can do more performing, if that makes sense, and less managing of the beat.”

The choice of picking the right man for the job came easy given Hot Buttered Rum’s widespread notoriety and their connection to the music scene in Northern California. Matt Butler also maintains Bay area stalwart status as a longtime player in the band Jambay, but most notably as the driving force behind organizing the rotating cast of characters in festival superjam band, the Everyone Orchestra.

“We had worked with Matt on a number of previous occasions, maybe most memorably at one of our Yosemite festivals. We felt we knew enough about him musically and personally to invite him aboard and it’s working out really well thus far.”

In constructing the more song-based album, Hot Buttered Rum also sought out to change directions in their selection of a producer. The previous album, *Well-Oiled Machine*, which happens to be one of the finest modern bluegrass records in existence, came under the direction of American mandolin and multi-instrumentalist legend, Mike Marshall, but they needed to go a different route with *Limbs Akimbo*. Hence, they chose Tim Bluhm from the Mother Hips, an old veteran at the art of transforming a band’s sound from longer more improvised, part-oriented pieces to concise, song-oriented music.

“We dubbed him ‘the Butcher.’ He has a great ear for what needs to be in a song, and what doesn’t need to be in a song. He helped us pick which songs to use, and helped us shape the shorter tracks on the album into what we hope will be good tunes for radio play. On the other hand, being a lover of live music, he knew when to let longer performances breathe, and how to egg on that side of our playing. A tune like *Summertime Gal* just can’t be short.”

Another big change for the band, as Erik alluded to earlier, came from the loss of a longtime bandmate, Zac Matthews, who sadly parted from the band back in late 2008. Opting not to say much on the subject, Erik simply remarked, "All of us agreed it was the right time to part ways. We did so with a load of good memories under each arm." One could speculate the reasons behind the departure, but all I know is that Zac gave his heart and soul to Hot Buttered Rum both with his mandolin/fiddle playing and also with his singing, and he is missed.

We have talked a lot about this not-very-phenomenal phenomenon on Hidden Track before, but frankly, bluegrass bands have a glass ceiling. Despite the critical acclaim and mass respect for the technical skills and creative conquests of composing and playing great bluegrass music, the genre simply does not have the same level of appeal or marketability of say indie rock or even that of more accessible improvised music.

On the other hand, the competition amongst bluegrass bands to attain the level of success that Hot Buttered Rum has achieved may be more intense than that of any genre. In doing so, there basically exists a need to be world-class virtuoso musicians. There exist a huge number of amazingly talented string bands in the country right now vying to be the next HBR, Yonder Mountain or String Cheese Incident, but for every one of them, there are a hundred talented small ones.

Frankly, this phenomenon presents a tough pill to swallow. The reason being bands like Old Crow Medicine Show, the Avett Brothers and the Dixie Chicks broke through to much more diverse audiences that laud their roots approach to songwriting and endears the high lonesome spirit, yet likely know little of the more traditional bluegrass scene.

Hence, for Hot Buttered Rum to seek a bit more crossover appeal makes total sense for a group of immensely talented musicians and singers as they progress into the next phase in their career. For bluegrass fans and die-hard Well-Oiled Machine fans, this probably presents mixed feelings, but anyone who has heard Limbs Akimbo,

"We'll always be proud of Well-Oiled Machine. I think it is some of the best all-acoustic playing we will ever record. Mike Marshall brought out great things in us, and singing with Peter Rowan was one of the better recording days of my life. We are most excited about what is happening now, though, and what's to come; that's just the nature of being a musician. I think making albums that are focused on songs, as opposed to instrumental work or purely acoustic playing, is how we'll do what we do best, and in that realm, the best is yet to come."

Finally, one thing about Hot Buttered Rum remains constant; they keep their heads up and at attention with regard to the issues of the day. What are they if not San Franciscans? We all know about their efforts on the environmental front, particularly with regard to the string of bio-fuel buses that run on vegetable oil, but what else is keeping them busy these days?

"We're all watching the health care debate play out. As independent artists, I'm sure you can imagine how tough it is to find ways to keep ourselves healthy. We're surrounded by great medical care that's off limits to those who don't work for large organizations with the leverage to command lower rates. It'd be a great help to the little guys if there was a way to group together. Is a public option the way to go here? Government-run bureaucracy has earned its bad rep. It wastes time and money. Then again, so has corporate bureaucracy. It makes its decisions based on profit. This is not inherently a bad thing, but maybe it's a better fit for making chairs than for dealing with people's lives. I'm no political genius, but I wouldn't want a shareholder deciding how long it was going to take for a fireman to get to my apartment."

In closing, I wanted to share a great quote from Erik's recent update on the HBR website about their Salt Lake City show. This puts forth what Hot Buttered Rum is all about better than anything I could say and more importantly, gives a sense of the reinvigorated spirit of the band: "The band felt like a mirror, shining back everything the audience had to give. On a good night, that's all we do."