

# 'The Simpsons' books Brave Combo

## Denton polka band to raise 'Stein' as show heads to Oktoberfest

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By MATT WEITZ / Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News

Brave Combo has made movies, toured around the world and even won a Grammy.

Now they're going to be animated.

The Denton polka band will appear on *The Simpsons* on March 14. In the episode, titled "Co-Dependent's Day," Marge looks for an activity for Homer that doesn't involve beer and naively takes him to an Oktoberfest celebration. The Combo provides the music at the festival.

The band's animated debut was brought about by show creator Matt Groening's enduring love of their music.

"I've been a fan of theirs since 1981 and *Music for Squares*," Mr. Groening recalls. "A friend of mine called them 'punk polka,' which they're not, but that got me interested. When I saw them, they filled me with such joy – the way they could make these glum punks just get up and dance like cornballs.

"I remember one night at the end of their show where they picked up acoustic instruments and started playing 'Baby Elephant Walk.' With the audience following them, they filed out of the street and into this coffee shop, completely waking up these sleepy hippies."

Band leader and founder Carl Finch also remembers Mr. Groening. "At first, he was just this guy who was always at the edge of the stage at the Alligator Lounge in Santa Monica," says Mr. Finch. "Eventually, we got to know him. He'd have us out to his house, get us to play at his friends' parties, he flew us out for *The Simpsons*' 20th- anniversary party, and the whole time he'd be saying, 'We gotta get you on the show!' "

"It was all just an excuse to have more Brave Combo shows to go see," Mr. Groening admits. "I actually wanted them to be on *Futurama*, because I'd once asked Carl what he thought the future of music

was, and he'd said, 'Polka.' Really, though, Brave Combo should have their *own* cartoon."

Combo fans shouldn't get their hopes too high, Mr. Finch warns. The group's profile will be lower than that of Poochie, "the rockin' dog" who temporarily joined Itchy and Scratchy on the show in 1997.

"We're in a tent, in the background, playing, but we're definitely there," he explains.

The band may be easier to find with your ears than your eyes. Although musical decisions are among the last made for an episode, when Brave Combo appears onscreen they'll reportedly be playing a bouncy little ditty called "Fill the Stein"; Mr. Finch says they've also contributed one titled "Wilkommen Oktoberfest" and an outro that's a polka version of the theme song.

"I hope that when I see the show, I'll be transported to this fourth dimension, where Marge and Homer are real people and they're dancing to our music," Mr. Finch says. "That kind of thing is pretty easy for me."

"Whenever they come to town, I drag as many people as I can to see them," Mr. Groening says. "They're appreciative of the roots of their music, but they're not afraid to reinvigorate things, either. They prove that you can be hip and still be happy."

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