

Dancing through the year

Band's new release catalogs a calendar worth of holidays

10:17 AM CST on Thursday, December 1, 2005

By **MARIEL TAM / Staff Writer**

Brave Combo is playing two consecutive nights, on stages some two blocks apart.

And each performance will show off a different side of the eclectic, holiday-loving band.

On Friday, the night after the band makes its annual appearance on the Square for Denton's Holiday Lighting Festival, Brave Combo will feature tracks from its brand-new album, "Holidays," at a CD release show at Dan's Silverleaf.

The Thursday night gig on the Square will be family-oriented and jam-packed with seasonal holiday songs.

"We know more Christmas songs than we could ever play in the whole hour," band leader Carl Finch said. That means holiday classics done in polka, cumbia, cha-cha and other dance-friendly styles.

"You know everybody wants to hear a screwed-up version of 'Rudolph,'" he said.

But Friday's performance will show more of what Finch calls "the edgy side of the holidays."

"Holidays" has a Hanukkah number (the "heavy metal klezmer" of "Hey, Little Dreidel") and a song for the naughtiest on Santa's list ("Coal and Switches"), but it's the other, less-celebrated holidays of the year that get to step into the limelight.

The project took more than a year to write and record, and the CD takes listeners through a mixed-up trip through the calendar with Brave Combo.

"We did this with a producer in Dallas who was wanting topical, original songs about specific holidays that were occurring at that moment," Finch said.

Spurred on by producer Larry W. King, who was hunting for comedy bits to distribute to radio stations for TM Comedy Network, Brave Combo came up with songs paying homage to Cinco de Mayo, Mardi Gras and Halloween.

"So it was a pretty interesting exchange," Finch said. "He was a fan of the band ... and we got to use the tapes at the end of the year."

The radio exposure didn't hurt, either.

"The regular DJs at those stations now are catching on," he said. "You know, Brave Combo never feels like we're going to have a hit record or anything, but it definitely feels like there's a vibe bubbling up around this."

Maybe that's because Brave Combo puts its own unique spin on annual festivities. Of the 19 tracks on the album, 17 are original songs.

The band plays it straight on "Auld Lang Syne" and a flute-laden "Hail to the Chief/Minstrel Boy" medley – well, except for the latter song's burst of presidential-style squawking, as though Charlie Brown's teacher were making a speech.

It's on the original tracks that the guys in the band get to cut up. On "I'm a Bunny Rabbit," with its hopping beat, Finch imagines the Easter Bunny's identity crisis: "It's a really weird job and it makes no sense, but I lay chicken eggs just like the hens." The polka song "No Work Today" is absolutely honest about what Labor Day is good for.

Bubba Hernandez takes the mic for the rough bluesy-rock vocals of "Mama Pushed Me Out," singing about being kicked out of the womb – "She said get out on your own, but don't forget to phone." He throws in a couple of carefully timed yelps amid the triumphant brass stylings.

Then, "Father's Day" envisions Danny O'Brien, singing instead of playing trumpet, as a cool cat who's figuring out this whole dad business. The organ and horns soar when dear old Dad gets his dues in the chorus – "But on Father's Day, they're making my breakfast, pouring my coffee, with Mom's supervision."

"Holidays" is being released simultaneously on Rounder Records and the band's own DenTone Records. Rounder is distributing the CD nationally; the DenTone pressings will be for sale at shows and around the band's hometown.

No matter which disc you get, Finch said, "it should be just the same great quality sound you've come to expect from Brave Combo."

Brave Combo

CD release show for Holidays. 10 p.m. Friday at Dan's Silverleaf, 103 Industrial St. Cover is \$10. Call 940-320-2000.

Online at:

<http://www.dentonrc.com/s/dws/drc/entertainment/dentontime/stories/120105drcdtbravecombo.13483d5a.html>