

# CALIFONE

## prog-rock goes full circle

In the 14 years since emerging from Chicago alt-blues outfit Red Red Meat, Califone has remained one of America's most fascinating and consistently rewarding bands. Melding a panoply of influences as disparate as traditional Appalachian folk songs, Delta blues, Can and Psychic TV to pop sensibilities, Califone has delivered a succession of stunning albums since an eponymous 1998 debut. Rich in texture, rhythmically intoxicating and lyrically oblique, the band has carved out a sub-genre as influential as it is intriguing.

In the first burst of concerted Califone activity since last year's North American trek opening for Wilco, lynchpin Tim Rutili is taking a permutation of the band on the road for a short run of West Coast dates, stopping at Vancouver's Biltmore Cabaret on August 9. Since the Wilco tour Rutili has been, as he likes to be, a busy man.

"I haven't really been working on Califone for a year," he says, "but I just finished scoring a film and am probably going to do that again when I get back from this trip. I just scored a movie called *Brawler*, directed by Chris Sivertson. It's the second movie I've done with him, and there were fight scenes, which was really fun. I've never got to do that before."

Rutili's improvisational live soundtrack work and intense interest in the world of film is well documented. Califone's current album, *All My Friends Are Funeral Singers* is actually a



companion piece to a movie of the same name, being Rutili's debut feature as writer/director. Califone's last headlining show in Vancouver saw the band screen the movie to a live soundtrack at the Rickshaw Theatre in December 2009. Fans of that work will be pleased to learn that Rutili is writing his second feature.

"I've been working on a new film project," he reveals. "I really enjoyed the challenge of making a film. More than anything I was really happy doing that, and it felt like making my first record. I felt like I had to do it again, like getting onto another rollercoaster! This one's a lot different and is something I'll be working on

by David Morrison

for the next year. It's called *The Belly and The Limbs*, and it's a road movie. That's all I can say right now."

As for the immediate future, specifically the forthcoming shows, Rutili promises a totally new approach to the Califone sound.

"It's going to be very different. The shows we're doing on the West Coast are going to be with Tim Hurley, who played in the first version of Califone and in Red Red Meat, and Griffin Rodriguez, a guy that I'm playing with in L.A. - and no drums. It's going to be pretty interesting."

As "Blue Hawaii", Rodriguez was a member of Bablicon alongside Neutral Milk Hotel's Jeremy Barnes, and formed experimental prog-jazzers Icy Demons with Man Man's Christopher Powell. Hurley's main gig is the gloriously uncategorizable *Sin Ropas* so, yes, as Rutili intimates, it's going to be pretty interesting.

Approaching two years since the release of the acclaimed career peak of *All My Friends Are Funeral Singers*, Califone fans ("Califans"?) itching for fresh material should get themselves along to the Biltmore. "There'll be some new songs," Rutili guarantees, "and we're just trying to figure out some new ways to do things, just because we've been doing it a similar way for so long. Hopefully the people that come will enjoy that."

*Califone performs at the Biltmore Cabaret on August 9.*