

Seventeen years on from their inception, CAKE is still an outsider – defiantly and proudly cutting their own path. Both their music and their way of operating in the ever-evolving marketplace are fueled by the same core principles of self-reliance, democracy, and integrity that inspired their formation. “We’re using the processes that we have always used,” explains lead singer and guitarist John McCrea, “but we’ve got different tools now. The intellectual and emotional components are consistent, but the scenario and the scale are always changing.” These values, which initially set CAKE apart from the crowded California club scene and thrust them into the national spotlight, continue to flourish, expanding outward into new directions and roles. “It goes along with maturing as a band,” says multi-instrumentalist Vince DiFiore. “We keep on adding more to the job description.”

Setting out from Sacramento, California in 1991, CAKE quickly graduated from packing local venues to becoming a favorite in the thriving San Francisco scene. The combination of McCrea's captivatingly unwitting amalgam of Jonathan Richman, David Byrne, and Woody Guthrie – off-kilter yet strangely relatable – with CAKE's shambolic country funk took Northern California by storm. Key to the band's sound then and now is DiFiore's trumpet playing, which makes brilliant use of a timbre rarely heard in post-modern rock.

*Motorcade of Generosity*, CAKE's debut album, was initially self-released before being picked up and re-released by Capricorn Records in 1994. It featured their first radio hit, “Rock ‘N’ Roll Lifestyle,” a wry deconstruction of rock star clichés and excesses. Their second album, 1996's *Fashion Nugget*, included the taut, propulsive hit “The Distance,” still a radio staple and heard regularly in TV and films, along with an unconventional reworking of Gloria Gaynor's “I Will Survive.” “Never There,” powered by a looped dialtone sample, announced the arrival of their third album, *Prolonging the Magic*, in 1998. That album also cemented the band's core lineup of McCrea, DiFiore, bassist Gabe Nelson, and guitarist Xan McCurdy. From there, the band moved to Columbia records for 2001's *Comfort Eagle* (featuring the hit “Short Skirt/Long Jacket”) and 2004's *Pressure Chief* (which included the popular “No Phone”). Each album built on the one prior, with increasing breadth and musical evolution, encompassing a range of styles including funk, soul, pop, jazz, rap, and country. “There is a CAKE sound,” says DiFiore, “but we are careful not to repeat ourselves. We acknowledge our strengths while finding new ways to express ourselves.”

*Pressure Chief* marked a bold step for CAKE, as it was the first album recorded by the band themselves, in their own studio. “That was when we started taking into our hands the tools of production in a very serious way,” reflects McCrea. “We learned how to turn the knobs and make it sound like we want it to sound – it may not be the right way, but it's the way we wanted it. We've always self-produced, from the beginning, but this is moving even further along in that direction.” Following the release of *Pressure Chief*, CAKE ended its relationship with Columbia Records and founded their own label, Upbeat Records. “There is something about the geometry of the relationship between artist and label that leaves the musicians at a disadvantage,” McCrea explains. “It's a bit of a schlep to have your own label, but, on the other hand, it is nice to not be told what to do or when to do it.”

“We never took for granted what a record company did,” DiFiore adds, “but you're always sitting on pins and needles waiting for the record company to do something with your record. When you're in control of it, your destiny is in your own hands.”

The first release on Upbeat was *B-Sides and Rarities*, which came out in 2007 and compiled over a decade's worth of rare and unreleased tracks. "It had been a long time between albums," DiFiore says, "and we wanted to offer our listeners something new. We thought about a live album, but that seemed too much like a greatest hits set – like we'd be putting a cap on our own career. So we sifted through our old tapes, looked under beds and in shoe boxes, and found a lot of songs – some people knew about, others were completely unheard."

"We took a lot of songs that didn't fit the mood of another album, and somehow created a coherent album out of them," McCrea explains. "There were some songs we did not have time to complete for other albums, so we took some time in the studio and finished some things that we'd always wanted to get done."

Before their new studio album hit stores in the summer of 2009, CAKE will present an expanded and remastered reissue of *Motorcade of Generosity*, available in early 2009 via Upbeat. "We've added some video from our first national tour, recorded back in May of 1995," says DiFiore. The reissue will also be available in a deluxe vinyl edition. "Looking back on it, through all that we've experienced, the dynamics of the band are very similar to when we first started. There have been some bumps along the way, but we've somehow managed to maintain our momentum and stay on track."

As-yet-untitled, CAKE's new studio album will be the first project they have undertaken since they overhauled their studio to run entirely on solar power. It was a decision that was made with both environmental and artistic consequences in mind. "It just seemed like the right thing to do," McCrea says. "I believe in science, and science is telling us that we need to make adjustments. Being in California, it seemed like a waste not to take advantage of all the free electricity."

"It felt great to get off the city's power grid and free up some electricity for the rest of the neighborhood," DiFiore adds. "We actually produce more electricity than we need right now. Also, it just feels better working there. We work in the spirit of cooperation, and when there is something like solar energy above your head, there is a little bit more levity added. It makes for a more positive environment."

Having toured extensively throughout the world, including North and South America, Europe, Australia, and Japan, CAKE has developed a vital and thriving community of listeners, with which the band interact with regularly on cakemusic.com. "We're always putting up new material, keeping a road journal, posting news items and links, along with a weekly poll and an advice column," DiFiore explains. "We try to encourage environmental responsibility: we have a carpool page for listeners who drive to shows, we give away a tree at every show, and we do a lot of linking to items about the environment and public policies that relate to it."

In the meantime, CAKE is putting the finishing touches on the as-yet-untitled new album. "I write songs all the time, so I have this stockpile of music," says McCrea. "I'll bring it in and play it on acoustic guitar and from that point the real work begins, the arrangement process. That's an arduous part of the whole experience – hundreds of small decisions that build upon each other."

“Fortunately,” DiFiore concludes, “since we’ve started doing this, people have become stronger musicians – more versatile, with a bigger musical vocabulary. People are bringing their musical growth to the table. For all we do, our strength is still working well together as a band.”