

Enter the Flange Factory: Math the Band releases a multi-concept project



Troubled times call for audacious measures. Math the Band is back, this time with a whirlwind of multimedia the likes of which has never been attempted. Their latest project, *Flange Factory Five*, is an immersive experience that includes a novel, record, game boy cartridge, energy drink and boutique guitar pedal.

MTB, sometimes billed as “Math The Band The Band,” is the project of frontman Kevin Steinhauser and a rotating cast of characters, which currently features guitarist Max Holbrook, bassist Adam Waz and drummer Matt Zappa. The band has been operational for 20 years, and based in Providence for 12.

A characteristically joyous effort, the *Flange Factory Five* features the band’s signature combination of glitchy, 8-bit keyboards over distorted guitars. A project like this requires the boundless energy they put forward in their ecstatic live shows, and it totally comes through on the recording.

The uptempo “Dual of the Deer” features guitars and synth lines in roaring triumphant harmony. “DKWIC” has a great Brian May-style guitar solo, and “Coach Says” is a hard-edged tune at the circle pit end of the spectrum. Stenhouse, who started the project in high school, puts every ounce of himself into the vocals.

Along with great playing throughout, this album brings us the best of grit and nerddom, like a skater punk version of the music from Crash Bandicoot. But the video game sounds can belie the smart composition and clever lyrics. “Wet Cement” is ultra-catchy montage fodder about starting a new chapter: “The fear is exciting and I can’t wait to be born.”

An additional treat is a suite of “Flange Factory Five” instrumental interludes that could be the jingle

for the cartoon television show of the same name.

I spoke with Kevin about the origins of this unique project.

Jake Bissaro (Motif): How did the multi-format concept come about? What made you want to release your own energy drink?

Kevin Steinhauser: I don't really recall a moment of inspiration. Each piece was something I had kicking around in my head for a while. It's basically the culmination of years of saying 'wouldn't it be funny if...' and then we just decided to go all in and do it for real.

JB: What is the book about?

KS: It's a choose-your-own adventure fantasy novel that plays off the ones marketed toward young adults, but very tongue-in-cheek with a lot of crass, dark humor. It revolves around a kid who meets a wizard and ends up needing to save the wizarding world. It ended up being a big universe of stuff; the novel mentions the pedal and energy drink heavily, and the Game Boy game is based on the novel.

JB: I have never heard of an album released on a piece of gear. How did that come about?

KS: The Flange Factory Five is a collaboration with our friend Frank, who makes small runs of handmade pedals under the moniker Frayed Knot. The pedal is a matrix of five flangers and five ring modulators, and also has the album stored on it, with a playback mode that lets you mess with the sounds. We're trying to make as many as 55, but they are large and expensive, at \$250. To keep things more accessible, we're making the "Flange Factory Zero" a slimmed-down version that's more of a collectible.

JB: Is there a particular fascination with the flange effect? Does gear play a big part in your inspiration?

KS: Not really. Personally, synths are really what I'm into. To be honest, we chose flange simply because "flange factory five" sounded funny. But I found a connection after the fact: The story goes that the effect was made for the Beatles as a way to mimic stereo. Apparently Paul, in an interview, was asked what the effect is called, and just said, 'Oh it's the flangelator,' making up a nonsense funny word.

JB: How has the band been handling pandemic life?

KS: To be honest, we've probably never been more productive. This whole project has been like 90% of the way there for about a year, so it was the opportunity we needed. We all have our own home studios and have been passing files back and forth, and recorded basically the whole album that way.

JB: What's next for the band?

KS: We're hoping in December to throw a big performance in the black box theater at AS220, playing the album front to back and adding in some theatrics.

Math the Band (the Band)'s Flange Factory Five Universe is available for purchase at flangefactoryfive.com. To coincide with Bandcamp Fridays, MTE will release a limited-run FFF product every first Friday for the rest of the year. The current schedule for releases is as follows:

September 4 — *Energy Drink*; October 2 — *FFF* record release; November 6 — *Guitar pedal*; December 4 — *Game Boy game*

The Brother Kite — *Make it Real*

I think it's appropriate at this point to refer to The Brother Kite as a Rhode Island rock institution on which we can still depend for polished, top-shelf indie rock. With five full-lengths now under their belt, *Make it Real* is the band's first release since 2013's *Model Rocket*.

Fronted by Patrick Boutwell and Jon Downs, TBK's specialty is a vintage jangle mixed with a deeply emotional frequency, like Teenage Fanclub mixed with Something Corporate. "Don't Ask Why" blends the elements pretty well, where a moody verse gives way to a vigorous, full-throated chorus. The smart instrumentation and production "Afraid To Even Try" uses the sleigh bells to add to the chime, with bang-on harmonies throughout.

The songs are well-formed and sure of themselves, though the shimmery guitar is a little too much at times; in "Rotten," the pedals seem to be the star of the show. Songs like "Hopeless Ghost" and "Dream to Me" tend to linger on your mind long after you've listened to them.

Make it Real is another compelling chapter in TBK story, and is worth your attention.

Check out *Make it Real* at the band's Bandcamp page.

Live Music Rundown

Live! Outdoors! In the next few weeks!

Askew

Friday, Sep 4: The Copacetics

Sunday, Sep 6: The John Allmark Super Jazz Octet

Dusk

Saturday, Sep 12: Absolute Eddie and Three Points of Madness

Saturday, Sep 20: New Idol