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PLUGGED IN: FAMILY OF THE YEAR

Written by **Mike Duffy** on December 19, 2012

Even though Family of the Year's third-ever show was a prestigious opening slot for Ben Folds at Boston's Symphony Hall, they didn't flinch.

Back in 2009, the fledging group was selected for the honor out of nearly 700 artists, with only a five-song EP available on the market at the time. Fortunately, most of the members had already been in other bands, so the thought of performing on such a massive stage was not as daunting as it might have been to other less-experienced musicians.

"Family of the Year would actually be like that third project that has gone on since we've been out here. The other bands were good, but obviously there was something missing about them."

"Starting off like that with the Ben Folds show was a little strange, but it was a great opportunity," said guitarist James Buckley.

They took full advantage of it, too.

Shortly after, Family of the Year released their critically acclaimed full-length *Songbook*. From there, it was off to the races, joining a tour that same year with folksy heroes Edward Sharpe and the Magnetic Zeroes. In fact, over the past year, they've been on the road for 10 out of 12 months, gaining even more seasoning.

"For us, it's just chugging along. It's nice that it keeps getting a little bit better with each tour," Buckley said. "And now, it's nice that we can go back to some of the bigger rooms and say, 'Oh yeah, we've been here before.'"

For Buckley, frontman Joe Keefe and his brother/drummer Seb Keefe, the band also probably made the right choice sticking with the light harmonies and beachy guitar licks.

Previous to Family of the Year, the Keefe brothers were in an alt-rock band called Unbusted. They also had an indie pop outfit called the Billionaires. Buckley admitted that he even dabbled in metal and mid-90s noise rock.

Once they matriculated west to Los Angeles in 2010 – losing original member and co-songwriter Vanessa Long in the transition – the Americana direction of Family of the Year seemed like the right fit.

“We always just say, ‘The band’s from L.A.’ But we’re not. The band is,” Buckey said with a laugh. “Family of the Year would actually be like that third project that has gone on since we’ve been out here. The other bands were good, but obviously there was something missing about them.”

With a new home and a new member on board in keyboardist Christina Schroeter, the band began writing and recording a follow-up effort to *Songbook*, sessions that yielded songs that landed on *Loma Vista*. To build buzz for the album, their previous label encouraged the release of the 2011 *St. Croix* EP, but the label went under shortly thereafter.

So it was back to the drawing board.

Once *Loma Vista* got tabbed by Nettwerk Records in early 2012, they were encouraged to drop another EP, this time in the form of the four-song *Diversity*, which featured a remix of the title track by Joe Keefe.

Finally in June, it was time for *Loma Vista* to hit the shelves.

According to Buckey, Family of the Year just kept rolling on when the original label went out of business.

“Fortunately for us, they gave us everything back, so we shopped it around again, and Network picked it up, and the cycle had to start again,” said Buckey. “That’s why we didn’t have the album release until July of 2012.”

Loma Vista is an homage to some of the setbacks and maturation of Family of the Year anyway.

It is the name of the street where the Family wrote most of the album.

It is also the place where their former van was stolen in a bit of Los Angeles welcome-to-the-neighborhood-ness.

Shockingly, after renting a U-Haul to get their gear to a show at the Troubadour, that truck got stolen as well. This time, much of their gear was inside including Buckey’s beautiful sunburst Fender Telecaster.

“It took a week and a half to find the van,” said Buckey. “They found it in Chino Hills. It was OK, except they left a box of our CDs, which I thought to be very insulting. Everything was insured, but it was a mad race to replace everything before our next shows.”

It’s been an intense year of shows, with tours in support of Milo Greene, Grouplove and Walk the Moon.

Along the way, they kept refining their energetic live show.

With the rise of folk-rock bands like the aforementioned Grouplove and Edward Sharpe and the Magnetic Zeroes, as well as Mumford and Sons and the Avett Brothers, Family of the Year fits into that genre at just the right time.

Family of the Year has overcome a lot of challenges during their journey – with moves across the country, being thrust into the limelight, finding themselves without any gear and a defunct label – but they have persevered.

“It’s always somewhat of an, ‘Oh shit,’ moment,” said Buckey. “But this band has gone through a lot as musicians and as people.

“After coming out here and trying hard to make something and seeing it go away, eventually you’re kind of like, ‘You know what, f–k it. Let’s just do what we want to do.’ That’s when things went well.”

For more information, visit Family of the Year’s [official website](#).



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