

# Spontaneous Combustion



"I'd been on the bus working with groups of students for a couple of years," says Herminio Quiroz, the audio engineer who worked with Fatty Koo on the John Lennon Bus. "But this was the first time where the chemistry was really strong, right from the start."

Suddenly, Fatty Koo was at a crossroads. "They'd worked together for a year," says Toby Gad, a producer to whom David Sonenberg turned when the chips were down. "They'd written 40 songs or so. They'd been to a really big studio trying to produce the best of those songs — and it went totally wrong. Everyone hated those productions. And they were at point zero. They were about to lose their deal because, though the music was good, it just wasn't great enough."

But Gad still believed they could deliver. "I told David, 'Hey, even if you don't have any more budget, just give me a plane ticket — I'll go over and try my luck with them,'" he remembers. The strategy was to shift gears completely, get back to their home base, and see if Gad and the group could recapture some of the musical magic that first happened on the bus.

**"When you're creating with people, it's such an intimate process that you don't want anyone else around," says producer Toby Gad. "When it's just me and my PowerBook and the artists in their living room, all that distraction is eliminated. And we can really work together, be loose and in the moment."**

## Discoveries in Columbus

"I went to Columbus and of course Fatty Koo didn't want to know about another New York producer," says Gad. "So I had to win them over." His secret weapons were his wide smile, his humble attitude and his unimposing production system. "I brought a good microphone and my PowerBook running Logic Pro" he says. "That's it. I had the essentials I needed to record an album."

"You see, when you're creating with people, it's such an intimate process that you don't want anyone else around. You don't want studio technicians running in and out. You don't want a mountain of gear getting in the way. When it's just me and my PowerBook and the artists in their living room, all that distraction is eliminated. And we can really work together, be loose and in the moment."

The pressure was on. This was likely Fatty Koo's last chance to deliver a strong album. Tensions were running hotter than usual. Gad took advantage of the situation by encouraging them to transform every emotional moment into music. "When an argument broke out between Valure and Gabrielle, I'd say, okay, keep fighting, but let's write what you fight," says Gad. "I'd play the piano and cajole them to sing their barbs to each other. Soon they were fighting and singing at the same time. And the music got real again. It was so emotional. It was great."

After just four days in Ohio, Gad returned to New York with four new tracks. "The management team loved them," he says, "and they sent me right back to Columbus." Forty days later, the album was virtually finished, made completely in Fatty Koo's living room studio and produced on Gad's PowerBook. "The experience was totally spontaneous. And I think you can hear it."

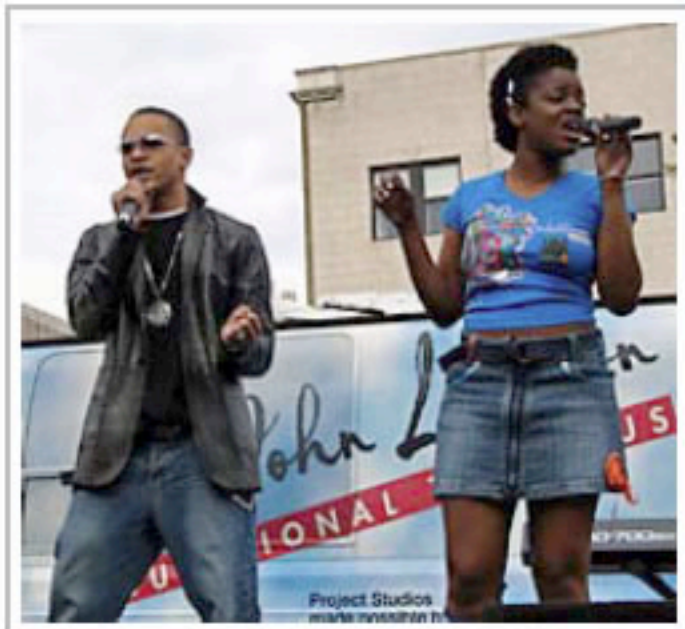
## Yes, But Can They Dance?

The completion of the album was just the beginning of another arduous show-business journey. Fatty Koo now had to transform its music into a viable live show and learn to project the energy and charm of the recordings to a living, breathing audience. The ups and downs of that ongoing effort are well documented in the weekly installments of "Blowin' Up: Fatty Koo."

The obstacles are many, and often ironic. Gabrielle, an obvious choice for the group's sex symbol, has trouble dancing. Supremely self-confident Valure suddenly can't cope with a photo shoot. Eddie B., one of the group's key songwriters, faces the specter of being axed because his singing voice doesn't stand up on stage. A new member, singer and saxophonist Josh, must elbow his way into the group's fragile camaraderie without stepping on too many toes. And all of them must confront their daily demons in the harsh glare of a video camera.

## The Human Touch

What emerges from the documentary series is a coming-of-age-in-showbiz story — the story of aspiring musicians grabbing for the brass ring, fighting among themselves, making necessary compromises and cohering into a family — while the star-making machinery of managers, producers, choreographers, voice coaches, photographers, fashion consultants and stylists swarms around them.



What we ultimately see is a portrait of some very determined young people trying, against all odds, to cling to the communal spirit that blossomed one day on a bus in Columbus, Ohio.

Ron of Fatty Koo, speaking from a different bus — this one, the group's own, as it tours the country in support of its first release — puts it this way: "Music is what I've always wanted to do. Whether it was in the basement of a church or on stage in front of hundreds of people, it's still a blessing to be where I am, making music. For us, it happened overnight. For you, it might take a while longer. But we're living proof that dreams do come true."

## Pro/Music

### Fatty Koo:

1. [The Tale of a Dream-Come-True](#)
2. Spontaneous Combustion



### Gad Goes Native

Barefoot and blingless, German-born Toby Gad is not anyone's stereotypical vision of a 21st-century neo-soul hip-hop producer. Yet his unconventional methods helped Fatty Koo overcome its first stumbles in the studio — perhaps because Gad's studio now fits neatly into a silvery slab that weighs just 5.6 pounds and fits into a backpack.

"Even when I have the option of working in a big studio, I prefer to use my PowerBook," says Toby. "It's got everything I need to produce a record — my own sample library, all my drum sounds, all my loops, on a single hard drive that I can use anywhere. I don't need a big sampler or a rack of synthesizers. Reverb and effects — everything's built into Logic Pro, and it all sounds utterly professional. That's been a quantum leap in my ability to produce songs completely on the laptop."

"Recording, sequencing, sampling, audio processing — Logic Pro on the Mac is the only program that unifies all these, in one native environment without any extra hardware. I can arrange a new song, do all the audio recording on my PowerBook, then finish the mix on my Power Mac G5, where I'm usually running between 60 and 100 audio tracks, with native plug-ins and effects on almost every channel. There is no other single technology that works this well, and this simply. And I'm really thankful for it. It's changed my career."

"Back in the day, you needed big money to make a record. But nowadays you can make a record with a few thousand dollars worth of equipment."



### Rothschild's Brainchild

The magic of climbing aboard the John Lennon Educational Tour Bus has illuminated the lives of thousands of young people across America. It's an experience they owe to the project's founder and executive director, Brian Rothschild.

"We met with Yoko Ono and my idea for the bus just grew from there," he says. "It's been evolving, taking on a wonderful life of its own, for the last seven years."

Rothschild remembers Apple's participation in the project as a turning point: "Previous to Apple coming on board, there were often little glitches — and any technical problem would be devastating. We're frequently in a different city every day, and we don't have time for problems."

"Apple solutions got the whole staff excited because of the seamless and simple integration of audio and video, using Logic Pro and Final Cut Pro, making everything more elegant and reliable. So they could concentrate on what's important — nurturing the kids' creativity."

"In a nutshell, that's what the bus is all about — what Yoko calls the Quiet Revolution. Putting the tools into the hands of young people in an effort to have them make the right choice, go down the right path — be part of the peace industry instead of the war industry."

Brian Rothschild's bus now travels from school to school, community to community, for ten months of the year. He is currently working with Apple Europe to launch a similar European project by September 2006.