

= Apollo 18 (album) =

Apollo 18 is the fourth studio album by American alternative rock duo They Might Be Giants . It was released in 1992 through Elektra Records and was named after the cancelled Apollo 18 mission which was scheduled to have followed Apollo 17 . The album was also associated with International Space Year , for which They Might Be Giants were declared the official " musical ambassadors " by NASA .

The album marked the first conscious effort by John Linnell and John Flansburgh to branch out of their early sound , opting for more traditional rock rhythms and fuller arrangements . The duo adopted a backing band with live drums during the supporting tour . It was their last album recorded as a duo , and the band expanded to include a regular rhythm guitarist , bass player , and saxophone player for their subsequent releases . Apollo 18 also includes the " Fingertips " suite , a series of twenty @-@ one songs , each under thirty seconds long . The album generated three singles , " The Statue Got Me High " , " The Guitar (The Lion Sleeps Tonight) " and " I Palindrome I " , although only the first charted .

The album received mostly positive reviews from music critics , with many commending the band for making music with a darker tone . However , the album was criticized for lacking a stand @-@ out lead single . Commercially , the album was not as successful as Flood (1990) , peaking at number 99 on the Billboard 200 and spending only six weeks on that chart . In addition , some fans were upset that and Flansburgh and Linnell opted to use a backing band for the album 's tour , with some even boycotting shows .

= = Recording and production = =

After the major success of Flood (1990) , Elektra sought out Elvis Costello to produce Apollo 18 ; however , John Linnell and John Flansburgh elected to produce the album themselves as they had originally planned . Prior to recording , the band upgraded many of their instruments ; Flansburgh purchased a Marshall amp and Linnell bought several new saxophones . The album was recorded at The Magic Shop in New York City , in approximately ten weeks . Although the band recorded Apollo 18 primarily as a duo , its production is much less sparse when compared to previous releases . This is reflected in the fact that the album 's associated tour , the Don 't Tread on the Cut @-@ Up Snake World Tour 1992 , was the band 's first to utilize a live backing band , rather than a tape deck playing backing tracks . Linnell later noted that this led to much more complicated and deliberate rehearsals .

= = Style and composition = =

The music found on Apollo 18 is slightly darker in tone and mood than the songs found on Flood . When it came to writing songs for the album , Linnell and Flansburgh used " old standbys " , such as producing harmonies through improvisation and generating melodies by sampling sounds in varying cycles . According to the album 's press @-@ release , however , Flansburgh and Linnell both sought to expand their horizons and incorporate new sounds and " extreme song arrangements " .

The album 's opening track , " Dig My Grave " has been described by Parry Gettelman of the Orlando Sentinel as " an angry , fuzzed @-@ out rocker " . The vocals for the track were recorded through a guitar fuzz @-@ box in order to distort them . " I Palindrome I " , is the final single that was released to promote Apollo 18 . The circular nature of the song 's lyrical themes is reinforced by its title and use of palindromes . In fact , the song is notable for featuring a word @-@ by @-@ word palindrome in one of the verses : " ' Son , I am able ' , she said , ' though you scare me . ' ' Watch ' , said I . ' Beloved " , I said , ' watch me scare you , though . ' Said she , ' Able am I , son . ' " " She 's Actual Size " was written by Flansburgh after he contemplated that the imagery of someone viewing a departing person in a mirror ; he felt that the symbolism was a " really succinct way of talking about leaving somebody behind " . The band later expressed disappointment with the " definitive " version featured on this album , largely because the song continued to develop as the band played it

live . Flansburgh called the album version " timid " and noted that " later performance versions of [the song] have so much more spirit than the recorded version . " Although Linnell and Flansburgh usually write songs individually , " My Evil Twin " was an example of the two collaborating . Linnell wrote the musical structure of the song , rendering it as a MIDI file , Flansburgh then wrote the melody and the lyrics . " Mammal " revolves around the idea that all mammals have hair at some point in their lifespan . According to Linnell , most of the scientific information in the song was gathered from an encyclopedia .

The first single released from the album was " The Statue Got Me High " . The titular lyrics originally started out as the dummy line " The Apple of My Eye " . However , Linnell soon conceived the line that would become the title , and he was amused at the juxtaposition of a statue ? something " utterly immobile and ? in the past " ? completely " blowing somebody 's mind " . " Spider " is an eclectic song that was made when Flansburgh and Linnell were experimenting with a sampler . Linnell provided almost all of the voices , save for the line , " must stop ! " which was spoken by Flansburgh . Flansburgh himself was responsible for the bongos , horns , and various sound effects . The second single from the album , " The Guitar (The Lion Sleeps Tonight) " , was spawned from a jam session of The Tokens song " The Lion Sleeps Tonight " . The song was also originally intended to simply be titled " The Guitar " . Due to the legal ramifications of including the " Lion Sleeps Tonight " motif , Elektra required the band to add the name of the original song to the title . The song features Laura Cantrell on the chorus . " Dinner Bell " references Ivan Pavlov , and his experimentations in classical conditioning by using a dinner bell to cause his dog to salivate . According to Rolling Stone , " Narrow Your Eyes " is a " touching breakup song that pays vocal tribute to The Beatles and The Four Seasons " . Spin magazine called the song " the most direct lyrically and simplest musically . " The opening line of " See the Constellation " ? described by Rolling Stone as " a psychedelic / New Wave potion " ? references railroad tracks and was inspired by a promotional photo of an Elektra recording artist who was resting on tracks . Flansburgh was struck by the " contrary elements of the image " , and he wondered , " How relaxing can that kind of rest be unless you ? ve given up on everything else ? "

" Fingertips " is a series of twenty @-@ one short tracks ranging in duration from 0 : 04 to 1 : 01 seconds , totaling 4 : 35 . The liner notes , in reference to these tracks , include the message " the indexing of this disc is designed to complement the Shuffle Mode of modern CD players " . According to John Flansburgh , listening to the album on shuffle made a collage of songs , with the short fingertips interspersed among tracks of regular length . Arnold Aronson argued that this element made the album " a stunning declaration of post @-@ modernism " due to its heavy use of " rupture , dissociation , and pastiche " . The songs were written to resemble short fragments of pop songs . The format was inspired by advertisements for collections of music , which only included samples of choruses . The " Fingertips " suite features vocal cameos from Peter Stampfel , who founded The Holy Modal Rounders , and Brian Dewan , who crafted the shrine that appeared on They Might Be Giants 's 1988 album Lincoln . Due to a mastering error , the European and Australian issues of the CD include " Fingertips " as one continuous track , while on the US edition , it is correctly split into 21 tracks . This concept of including extremely short songs on an album was later somewhat recycled for the band 's sixteenth album , Nanobots , which contains twenty @-@ five songs , nine of which run under one minute each . The album concludes with " Space Suit " , a jazz @-@ influenced song with synthesizer elements . The song had been written to make use of chords that Flansburgh had learned under the tutelage of Jack DeSalvo . The song originally was titled " I 'll Remember 3rd Street " , a nod to its " jazzy origins " , but once the keyboard elements were added , the band decided to give it a name that was more " spacey " .

= = Title and packaging = =

The title of the album references NASA 's aborted Apollo 18 mission , originally planned to land in the moon 's Schroter 's Valley in February 1972 . The album 's cover depicts a giant squid locked in combat with a sperm whale in space , using graphics which the Johns came across while searching the NASA Archive Center for images to use in media art surrounding the album . The Dial @-@ A

@-@ Song phone number is misprinted as 718 @-@ 963 @-@ 6962 on the back of the album , and the phone number written leads to a warehouse . The album liner notes and artwork for the album 's singles include a number of photographs from NASA , and the packaging was designed by John Flansburgh , under the pseudonym " Rolf Conant " , with Barbara Lipp .

= = Promotion = =

Between 1992 and 1993 , Bo Orloff , the band 's assistant manager at the time , sent out various informational updates via email to the band 's mailing list . These included a full track listing prior to the album 's release , as well as a press release and biography of the band . The bulletins also included information on the album 's associated tour .

The band appeared as a musical guest on numerous talk shows to promote Apollo 18 . " The Guitar (The Lion Sleeps Tonight) " and " The Statue Got Me High " were performed on The Tonight Show with Jay Leno and " I Palindrome I " on Late Night with David Letterman . Their appearance on The Tonight Show with Jay Leno on 19 May 1992 was the television debut of They Might Be Giants 's new backing band .

= = = International Space Year = = =

The band became associated with the International Space Year (ISY) , designated as 1992 by the United Nations to promote peaceful and collaborative space exploration , when Linnell and Flansburgh were searching the NASA Archive Center for appropriate photographs and visual materials for the album artwork . Staff members at the NASA facility took notice of the duo and inquired about their research . Linnell responded that they " were in this band , we 're making this record , and we 're going to start touring next year ... They were particularly interested in that , because they said that 1992 was ISY . It was the first time we ever heard of that , but they said because we were a band going to be touring around the world in 1992 they wondered if we wanted to be spokesband for the ISY . So we said why not ? "

The band was soon declared the official " musical ambassadors " for the year , although , according to Linnell , it was more of an informal arrangement . The band had originally planned to create short videos called " Space Minutes " which would have aired on an unspecified cable television station that was affiliated with ISY , but the plans never came to fruition . In support of the designation , the logo for ISY is included on the back cover of the album . The band was scheduled for concerts to endorse ISY , and mentioned in promotional material from NASA , which headed the celebration in the United States . Commenting on the success of the designation of International Space Year , however , Linnell pointed out that he " [didn 't] think most people have heard that this is International Space Year " .

= = = Don 't Tread on the Cut @-@ Up Snake World Tour = = =

In support of Apollo 18 , They Might Be Giants embarked on a tour across the United States , Europe , and Asia . The tour was named the " Don 't Tread on the Cut @-@ Up Snake World Tour 1992 " , a reference to the Gadsden flag and the " Join , or Die " cartoon , with the " world tour " affix appended by Elektra Records . The band 's largest tour up to that point , spanning the length of 1992 , the Don 't Tread on the Cut @-@ Up Snake tour was also associated with ISY . Although they were initially hesitant about using live backing musicians , it was also the first tour for which Linnell and Flansburgh were joined by a live band , consisting of a rhythm section and saxophonist . They were encouraged to adopt the larger touring outfit by their Elektra A & R representative , Susan Drew . The band also expanded to include a regular rhythm guitarist , bass player , and saxophone player for their subsequent studio recordings .

The band 's " O Tannenbaum " single was recorded during a sound check on the tour . The track would later reappear on the They Might Be Giants in Holidayland EP , released in 2001 .

== Promotional video ==

A short video promoting Apollo 18 was produced by Elektra Records , in the vein of the previous Flood promo . In the video , graphic and video illustrations of certain songs are presented , in addition to samples of some of the songs . The video is arranged to resemble a traditional slide show presentation . The video also introduced the concept of the three " Power Spheres " , from which the compilation album A User 's Guide to They Might Be Giants : Melody , Fidelity , Quantity (2005) would take its subtitle .

== Reception ==

== Critical reception ==

Apollo 18 garnered positive reviews from critics . Writing for AllMusic , Stephen Thomas Erlewine gave the album 4 out of 5 stars and stated that it was more " consistent " than predecessors , making note of its darker tone . However , Erlewine also felt that the album was " lacking a standout single " . Robert Christgau , who assigned the album an A ? , praised the first five tracks especially , asserting that the remaining thirty @-@ three were more experimental in nature . Christgau acclaimed the album melodically , while stating that the lyrics were pleasant but " meaningless " . Ira Robbins , reviewing for Rolling Stone magazine , gave Apollo 18 4 out of 5 stars . Similar to Christgau , Robbins called the lyrics throughout the album " whimsy " , and said that they were not too complex to weigh down melodies . Robbins also praised the album 's eclecticism , observing that " ' Turn Around ' mimics Forties swing ; the funky bass groove of ' The Guitar ' interpolates a rewrite of ' The Lion Sleeps Tonight ' , fetchingly sung by Laura Cantrell . Another wry science lesson , ' See the Constellation ' , mixes a psychedelic / New Wave potion for a bouncy space trip . " Robbins was critical of the disorganized " Fingertips " selections . A review by Craig Tomashoff , published in People , lauded the variety found in " Fingertips " . Tomashoff also made note of the wide vocabulary employed in the lyrics (citing , specifically , " Turn Around " and " I Palindrome I ") , concluding that the album was " totally cool " .

== Consumer response ==

On April 11 , 1992 , Apollo 18 peaked at number 99 on the Billboard 200 . It spent six weeks on that chart . " The Statue Got Me High " , the first single from the album , peaked at number 24 on the Billboard Modern Rock Tracks chart on March 21 , 1992 , and spent eight weeks on the chart . The album 's other singles failed to chart .

Apollo 18 debuted on the Australian ARIA albums chart at number 60 on April 26 , 1992 , before peaking at number 59 the following week ; it spent 6 weeks in the top 100 .

Although Apollo 18 received a positive response from consumers and critics , some fans were upset that the duo of Linnell and Flansburgh had been augmented to include a full band for the album 's tour . In rebuttal , some fans stopped attending live concerts , even taking the aggressive approach of trying to discourage others from entering venues for shows . Despite these reactions , the live band was generally well received . In a New York Times review of a contemporaneous live show , Jon Pareles observed that the band was " just as tricky as ever " , and still delighted its audience . They Might Be Giants continues to record and tour with a full backing band .

== Track listing ==

All songs written and composed by They Might Be Giants , except where noted .

== Personnel ==

== Chart performance ==

Album
Singles

== Release history ==

Apollo 18 was released on CD and cassette in the United States , Australia , and Canada and on CD , LP , and cassette formats in European markets by Elektra Records . In 2013 , a two @-@ part CD compilation collected Apollo 18 and some contemporary B @-@ sides along with the band 's other Elektra studio albums and surrounding material . The album was also released on LP in the United States and Canada by Asbestos Records in 2014 as part of a series of LP reissues spanning They Might Be Giants 's period on the Elektra label .