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## Stratospheerius

*An interview with electric violinist Joe Deninzon**CD: The Adventures of Stratospheerius*

Record Label: *D-Zone Entertainment*  
 by **Tina Hall**  
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The band **Stratospheerius** features Joe Deninzon (vocals, violin, mandolin), Jamie Bishop (bass), Aurelien Budynek (guitars), and Lucianna Padmore (drums). The sound is hard to classify in a genre. It combines modern and classic music in a way that is hard to find. The new album *Headspace* showcases the style nicely.

**Maximum Ink:** Who are some of your earliest influences and why?

**Joe Deninzon:** My influences have a very wide range. In classical music it would be Beethoven, Stravinsky, and Mahler. In jazz, Miles Davis and John Coltrane. In rock, Led Zeppelin, Queen, Hendrix, Kiss, Frank Zappa, Mahavishnu Orchestra, Yes, The Police, Steely Dan, Stevie Wonder, Bruce Springsteen, the Beatles, to name a few. I like musicians who take chances and blaze new trails. I also love performers with a great stage presence who take their audience on a transcendental journey, which is what I strive to do. I also am fascinated by music that can connect with as many people as possible on a primal level, but can also be analyzed on a deeper level. Music that is seemingly simple yet has many layers of complexity underneath. That is something I've been trying to create for years, and I feel I'm getting closer.

**MI:** What was it like to move from Russia to Cleveland as a child? Do you ever miss Russia?

**JD:** I don't have vivid enough memories of Russia to miss it. I grew up in the midwest around American culture. I was only four years old when we emigrated. I do remember that it was very tough at first going to school in the US not knowing the language, and it took me a few years to adjust. Russia is a beautiful country and I particularly love my birthplace of St. Petersburg, but I don't think I would want to live there.

**MI:** What was it like to teach at the New School in Manhattan? Do you miss teaching?

**JD:** The New School was a great experience, but I am still teaching privately and taught Rock Violin at the Mark Oconnor String Camp in New York recently. I am also working on a book about Electric Violin styles for Mel Bay Publications.

**MI:** You played with Alex Skolnick from Testament for a short period. What was that like? What did you learn from that?

**JD:** Alex Skolnick is an incredible musician and a mind-blowing guitarist. I grew up listening to him and had to pinch myself at times to believe that I was actually working with him. It was great having him in the band and we still stay in touch. One thing I learned was that people need to accept my music on its own terms and I should not rely on having a big name in the band in order to attract an audience. I grew tremendously as a musician from working with him, but since he left the band to focus on his projects, I think my self confidence and faith in my music grew significantly.

**MI:** What is the oddest gig you've ever played?

**JD:** There were quite a few. We played at a correctional facility in Vermont. The inmates loved the band and were really appreciative that we were there. We have also played nude Pagan festivals, marijuana festivals, and rock n porn festivals, which featured 12 screens of hardcore action on the stage, some of which faced us and some of which faced the audience. Needless to say, very hard to concentrate on playing music that night.

**MI:** How would you describe the Stratospheerius sound? What genre do you think it fits most?

**JD:** It's hard to describe what we do, you just have to hear it. I have described it as "psychojazz electric fiddle trip funk" and "Dave Matthews on crack." I would say we are a band that straddles the fence between the "jam band" and progressive genre. We mix hard rock with funk, jazz, fiddle music, and blues, and different ethnic flavors and roll them into memorable songs with hooks. All of this with the electric violin as the focal instrument.

**MI:** What inspired you to combine classic and modern music?

**JD:** I grew up studying classical violin, but I feel madly in love with rock n roll at around age 9. My whole life growing up was spent trying to reconcile my love of rock, jazz, and pop with my training and love of classical music. For a while, I also seriously took up guitar and bass. When I discovered the electric violin and the fact that I could play all of my favorite music on the instrument I spent my life studying, my path in life was set. It also helped that there were not a lot of people doing it at the time and I felt that I could find my own voice and blaze my own path on the electric violin.

**MI:** What do you think you'd of became if not a musician?

**JD:** I always toyed with being a writer. When I was a kid, I had a major Stephen King phase and wanted to write horror novels. I even won some awards in college for some essays that I had written. The Mel Bay book allows me to combine my love of writing with my love of music.

**MI:** Why do you feel music is so powerful in affecting our everyday lives?

**JD:** I try to be sincere and speak from the heart, but I love the fact the rock n roll is grandiose and larger than life, and I love that music can transport you. I also get off on the idea of writing something memorable that stays in people's heads. All the great musical influences I mentioned earlier had a profound effect on me as a human being and continue to inspire me today, so my goal is to have the same effect on other people that my heroes had on me.

**MI:** What projects do you have in the works?

**JD:** In addition to the book, I just released my first acoustic jazz CD, available at [www.joedeninzon.com](http://www.joedeninzon.com). The disc is called "Exuberance" and it's my jazz trio. The instrumentation is acoustic violin, bass, and guitar. We play in the style of Stephane Grappelli, but mix in music by Radiohead and Alice in Chains, among others. I am also mixing the next Stratospheerius CD, due out next year. I also just joined the Sweet Plantain String Quartet, which mixes jazz, classical music, hip hop, and Latin styles. [www.sweetplantain.com](http://www.sweetplantain.com)

**MI:** Where can fans go to get the latest information on the band's happenings?

**JD:** [www.stratospheerius.com](http://www.stratospheerius.com) and I am also on myspace, facebook, and twitter.

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