

Fatty Koo

The Tale of a Dream-Come-True

By David Levy



Fatty Koo performs in front of the John Lennon Educational Tour Bus, where it all began. From left: Josh, Eddie B., Gabrielle, Ron, Marya, Valure.

It's a story that quickens the pulse of anyone who's ever been young and strummed a guitar, coaxed a melody from a keyboard or lifted a voice in song — even if only in the shower.

A bus arrives in Columbus, Ohio. Kids from a struggling community arts program hop on board and discover to their delight that they're in an honest-to-goodness recording studio. Their task is to write and record a song and make a music video — in just one day. Because tomorrow, the bus will be moving on.

Music Makes Strange Busfellows

On the bus that fateful day was a sweet-voiced, strong-willed young songstress named Valure. Valure knew Gabrielle from their time harmonizing together in church — and vying for recognition as the choir's best vocalist. Gabrielle's friend, Eddie B., had been nursing songwriting ambitions for years. He knew Ron — rapper, keyboard player and aspiring producer — from the neighborhood. The wild card in the mix was Marya — a Venezuelan-born classical cellist whose talents would earn her a scholarship to the Oberlin Conservatory of Music.

That scholarship, ultimately, would have to wait. Because by the time they got off the bus — even though they'd never played together before — they were destined to become a unique pop group called Fatty Koo, with a big-time New York manager, a recording contract with Sony BMG Music and a CD poised to hit the charts.

“This was head and shoulders above anything else,” says

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The Bus

The John Lennon Educational Tour Bus includes a front studio, rear studio, DJ station and student workstations loaded with musical instruments, computer hardware and software, and recording devices donated by project sponsors. Below is a much-abbreviated list of the bus's state-of-the-art gear:

- Two Dual 2.5GHz [Power Mac G5s](#)
- [23- and 30-inch Apple Cinema Displays](#)
- Eight 15-inch [PowerBook G4s](#)
- [Logic Pro 7](#)
- [Final Cut Pro](#)
- [DVD Studio Pro](#)
- [GarageBand](#)
- [Maxell](#) DVDs, CDRs, batteries, tapes
- [iGuitar by Brian Moore Guitars](#)
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- [JVC](#) GY-DV5000U professional camera
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- [Furman](#) HA-6A headphone amplifiers
- [Ultimate](#) mic and instrument stands
- Unitor mk11 MIDI router
- [Aphex](#) 1100 mic preamps and 1400 series pedals
- [Glyph](#) GT 308 Firewire hard drive system
- [Stanton](#) Final Scratch and STR8-150

founder of the John Lennon Educational Tour Bus Brian Rothschild, of Fatty Koo's video made on the bus. "It was the first thing that made me think, these kids could be professional."

The story of their pothole-filled journey to potential stardom has been preserved in the BET documentary series "Blowin' Up: Fatty Koo." The story of what happened on the bus that day is somewhat less fraught with drama — but slightly more earth-shaking in terms of what it implies for the future of music, aspiring musicians and the music business in general.

The Tools and the Talent

When the John Lennon Educational Tour Bus, a nonprofit enterprise committed to giving young people free, hands-on experience creating their own music and video projects, rolled into Columbus, Herminio Quiroz, one of several hard-traveling audio engineers staffing the bus, had reason to be excited. The studio in the bus had just been outfitted with two new Power Mac G5 computers, eight PowerBook G4 laptops and Logic Pro music production software.

"What that meant was that instead of a hodgepodge of hardware-based samplers and sequencers, we finally had a single, software-based system that could do it all," says Quiroz. "I was just getting acquainted with the whole system and realizing how much it would free me to work more directly with the kids and not with the technology."

But even more exciting was how well and how quickly the future members of Fatty Koo gelled into a musical unit. "I'd been on the bus working with groups of students for a couple of years, doing everything I could to help them learn how to write and record songs," says Quiroz. "But this was the first time where the chemistry was really strong, right from the start. All of them were excellent singers and songwriters, and Ron produced the whole track. Usually I had to get heavily involved with that end of things, but in this case the creativity was just flowing. In six hours we had a solid music track and a video — and it was done with ease."

The Big City

Cut to the New York office of Brian Rothschild, founder of the John Lennon Bus and its tireless fundraiser. "I always get the finished music videos from the bus," he recounts. "I pop them in my PowerBook while I'm doing a dozen other things. And that's when Valure's voice caught my ear. It was so rich, so immediately credible, so unmistakably real. I just got ridiculously overexcited, and played it over and over. Because I'd seen so many very talented kids — I'd been looking at these things for years — but this was head and shoulders above anything else. It was the first thing that made me think, these kids could be professional."

Rothschild brought the music to the attention of David Sosenberg, an impresario whose résumé brims with genre-defying (and million-selling) acts like the Fugees, the Spin Doctors, the Black Eyed Peas and Joan Osborne. Suddenly, wheels were in motion. Contracts were wielded. And the lives of a bunch of kids from Columbus, Ohio, were about to change forever.

Flown to New York and thrust into a state-of-the-art studio with two industry-savvy, hit-making producers, the members of Fatty Koo

[Scratch](#), [Final Scratch](#) and [SRS](#) 150 turntables

- [Digidesign ProTools](#) HD3 Accel
- Plug-ins by [Waves](#), [IK Multimedia](#), [McDSP](#), [BitHeadz](#), [Spectrasonics](#) and [Antares](#)



House of Fatty Koo

Fatty Koo's debut album, "House of Fatty Koo," was released on July 12. You can find it at the [iTunes Music Store](#).



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responded as anyone naturally would — by freezing up.

Intimidated by immense consoles with innumerable knobs and faders, locked in individual rooms, strapped to hundred-dollar headphones, trying to communicate through walls of soundproof glass, the group ended up with a handful of tracks that made not a single soul happy. Not their new management. And not the musicians. “This,” sighs Valure in a poignant moment from the documentary series, “is no better than what we did by ourselves.”

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