

"My Mom used to say there was a lot of music going on in 1966—the year I was in the womb. She was just digesting all the music that was around her in Montreal, Canada, and Beatles music of course. And when she went into labor, she got up and clicked on the radio and started dancing to get the process moving." Later, it was "growing up with my two older brothers playing music in the garage. I just wanted to be a part of that."

Convertino was also subsumed within music from before he took his first breath. His father was a piano tuner by day who also played night gigs on piano and accordion. His mother sang spiritual music professionally and developed her brood into a family band, finally pulling in a resistant nine-year-old John when she offered to get him a drum kit.

"I think it also comes from being excited not just about rock and music, but having an appreciation for theater and the arts and installations and museums," explains Burns of their adventurism. "Or coming to Tucson and getting an old car and finding an old house and fixing it up and seeing what you can do to make it unique yet still maintain a certain amount of connection to where the tradition comes from."

Calexico's musical independence is matched by their determination to make their way outside the major label system as, up to this point, a self-managed entity. "Why not apply as much creativity as you put into the music into the business side of things?" Burns insists. "I'd rather take the route that is less pressure and more inspired with ingenuity and creativity, and work with people that are doing it for the right reasons."

"I've always thought that you're better off getting a loan from a bank than trying to do a record deal with a major label," observes Burns. "It makes more sense to put it on your credit card and than just slowly pay it off. You are ultimately going to own what you made."

And wherever the music takes Calexico in the future, the bond between Burns and Convertino remains at the core. "As the band is becoming more unified and opened with all the creativity and sharing the profits on tours and now with studio recordings and all this stuff, it is really essential that John and I still have this connection, and I don't want to lose that," says Burns. "For me, it's the most important aspect of how this music comes about."

"One of the main reasons why playing with John has been so rewarding because he is so

open and encouraging to getting off the usual road and being adventurous with the music from night to night. And I love that," stresses Burns.

The potency of their union has brought Calexico in America to the verge of the next level—a stature similar to the what they've already reached in Europe. Without any intentional designs on their part, Burns, Convertino and the rest of Calexico, with the help of Foster, have created an album with a number of radio ready tracks. They began their year with an appearance with Iron and Wine on CBS TV's *Late, Late Show*—the group's first time on the late night shows that help bring rising acts to a wider audience. It will only take but a few small breaks in the right direction for Calexico to become one of the bands that truly matters in the current musical zeitgeist.

And that will afford Calexico the opportunity to explore further creative approaches to the sort of music they make and the way they present it along with more collaborations and artistic side excursions—a prospect that only sparks their dynamic imaginations towards greater musical adventures. "We've been pretty lucky so far," Burns cautiously concludes. "I can only hope that we'll be so lucky for the next 10 years." **H**