



**17 Hippies, with a core of 13 members, mixes pop sounds with European folk melodies.**

# 17 Hippies far out with Berlin blend

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Let's set the record straight right from the beginning. The name — 17 Hippies — suggests a band filled with nostalgic flower children in beads and long hair, but this German band doesn't number 17 and there are no hippies in sight. The name was simply pulled out of the air one night when a concert

announcer asked a band with no name how it wanted to be introduced.

In reality, the core of this acoustic band is 13 people; its rotating extended family includes over 30. Band members play an assortment of instruments, including accordion, ukulele, Indian tanpura, Irish bouzouki, banjo, guitar and assorted other string, brass and wind instruments. The renegade sound of 17

Hippies — captured on the new disc "Heimlich" — is an engaging blend of pop sounds and traditional eastern European folk melodies.

"But it's not rural music," vocalist/ukulele player Christopher Blenkinsop said, in a conversation from his Berlin office. "It's the type of music you would expect to hear today if you came to Berlin."

The fall of the Berlin Wall was

the starting point for 17 Hippies. Blenkinsop and friends would go to the east side of the city and meet musicians who were from what seemed to them a totally different culture. These artists knew the intricacies of traditional Balkan folk music, but popular music — even the Beatles — was foreign to them.

"Our city totally changed in a matter of days," Blenkinsop recalled. "It looked similar and the

language was the same. It was simply fascinating, familiar and different at the same time."

Learning the folk music styles became an obsession. The musicians would meet casually once a week to work on the new melodies. "It just got out of control," said Blenkinsop, laughing. "We had to redirect everything we were doing. The scales were impossible at first."

About five years ago, the players began to realize that

what began as simply a group of people playing at parties was beginning to sound like a working ensemble.

Since band members changed from week to week, the group's music always was evolving. Their dizzy mix of acoustic instruments stood out against the techno craze then sweeping the city.

"At the time, there was no such thing as German folk music or world music," Blenkinsop said. "People

thought we had gone mad.

"We all come from different musical backgrounds and we all have ideas," Blenkinsop said. "It's my job to get the music to flow in one direction. But nothing is holy and sacred. All of it has to go through the Hippie mill. We all make the sound come to life."

*17 Hippies perform at 9:30 p.m. Sunday at the Hideout, 1354 W. Wabansia; and at 8 p.m. Tuesday at Martyrs', 3855 N. Lincoln.*