POP MUSIC

Brazilian Girls aren't just as billed

"Categories don't matter to us," its singer says. And she might say it in one of about five languages.

By Charlie Amter, Special to The Times

One way to guarantee your fledgling band receives attention, at least on the Internet, is to choose a provocative name. New York's Brazilian Girls wisely chose one that virtually guaranteed search engine-driven numbers. Composed of zero Brazilians, three men (one of whom is Argentine) and exactly one woman, the eclectic outfit now has plenty of actual fans to match the virtual ones who may have hit their website accidentally. Those who stumble across the quartet's website are treated to samples of Brazilian Girls' polyglot style — in French, Spanish, German, Italian and English — sometimes all in the same song.

"We get bored very easily," explains Sabina Sciubba, born in Rome and raised near Munich.

The 27-year-old isn't kidding.

The critically acclaimed group's second full-length album, "Talk to La Bomb," explores electronic, jazz, pop, rock, dance and funk over the course of its 12 tracks. The buzz is strong on Brazilian Girls, to the extent that they are getting booking requests from as far away as Iceland, where the band played a festival earlier this month (they will hit the Wiltern LG on Tuesday).

From the synth-led swagger of the Ric Ocasek-produced "Last Call" to the slow and seductive pop of "Rulers of the Game," Brazilian Girls are a Virgin Megastore employee's worst nightmare when it comes to filing CDs by genre.

"We don't really care — categories don't matter to us," Sciubba says. Although the back cover of "Talk to La Bomb" says "File under pop/rock" in small print, one would be hard-pressed to limit the band to just two genres.

Interestingly enough, the band has focused its sound lately, when compared with its eponymous first full-length album, released in 2005. On that debut disc, Brazilian Girls were even more all over the map, with several reggae-inspired songs and one track, the Björk-like "Don't Stop," that was an underground house-music hit last year. Still, critics and others — including KCRW-FM (89.9)'s Nic Harcourt, who has long been a champion of the group — swooned over the disc.

Although the album was only a modest hit sales-wise (it has sold just shy of 79,000 copies, according to SoundScan), the band's reputation as an energetic live act has set the table for a possible crossover to the mainstream this time around, in the tradition of other left-of-center, genre-bending acts from New York such as Dee-Lite or the Talking Heads.

In contrast to its debut, "Talk to La Bomb" is a darker, noisier record. "I can't say it was a conscious decision," Sciubba says of the record's moodier moments, which may lose some less adventurous fans still stuck on the "good vibes" of the group's earlier material. "It was really just what came out in the studio."

Consciously or not, Brazilian Girls' new offering takes risks. Instead of predictable electro-pop for 12 tracks, listeners are now treated to the occasional tune such as "All About Us," which exemplifies the originality of the foursome today — even though the band has been playing the track live in various forms for at least a year.

The song, a sleek funk workout between drummer Aaron Johnston and bassist Jesse Murphy, begins with a jazzy intro and ends with a noisy, atonal romp that might as well have taken place at New York's famed Knitting Factory any night during the past 10 years. (Murphy and Johnston both played on John Zorn's 2003 release "Voices in the Wilderness.")

Although "All About Us," which Sciubba says is about "global polarization," stands in stark contrast to anything the band has offered up in the past, one common thread remains — you can't help but want to dance upon hearing it.

Brazilian GIRLS have sought to get people moving since they first starting jamming together nearly three years ago in a small Manhattan club called Nublu.

Sciubba and her longtime boyfriend, Argentine keyboardist Didi Gutman, hooked up with Murphy and Johnston at the
Avenue C outpost every Saturday in early 2004 until they became a formidable presence downtown in New York. Eventually, record labels started to notice the eclectic outfit's draw.

Ultra Records released the band's EP, "Lazy Lover," in 2004 before Verve's Forecast imprint signed them to a multi-album deal the same year. Though the band has had its fair share of detractors — especially those not fond of Sciubba's propensity to sing in multiple languages — the singer shrugs off the criticism.

"Some people just think, 'What is this? I don't understand a word.'" she says. "But others appreciate it. I think from the outside it might seem a little pretentious, but that's really how my life is."

Indeed, in the middle of an interview via phone, Sciubba breaks into flawless Spanish while buying a soda from a Brooklyn bodega.

"I've lived in many different countries, so when I pick up the phone you never know what language I'm going to speak," she says by way of apology.

The frontwoman offers up no apologies, however, for her slightly eccentric sense of style. Sciubba performs all shows covering her eyes — sometimes simply wearing sunglasses, other times using improvised barriers to light such as electrical tape.

"I can always see, but nobody can see my eyes," she says.

When prodded about whether the visual shtick symbolizes anything to her, the streetwise Brooklyn girl in her comes out.

"So I don't have to see the injustice of the world," she says and laughs.

"Really, it's so all these poor women aren't intimidated by my immaculate beauty."

Spoken like a true champion of women's rights around the world.

**Brazilian Girls**

**Where:** Wiltern LG, 3790 Wilshire Blvd., L.A.

**When:** 9 p.m. Tuesday

**Price:** $25

**Info:** (213) 380-5005

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