

# HIGH ALTITUDE

**DARRAGH MURRAY** chats to **PHOEBE BAKER** of **ALPINE** about their evolution from a high school project to a band about to embark on their first headline tour of the east coast... along with the group's apparent disposition to peculiar ailments.



The music of Melbourne-based Alpine recalls the infectious dance pop of LCD Soundsystem with meandering dreamscape of Britain's The xx. And while 2010 proved something of an early peak in the group's fledgling career thanks to regular Triple J rotation, it hasn't been without some challenges.

"We've had quite a few strange illnesses," Phoebe states emphatically. "I think I embarrassed Ryan, our bassist, on the radio a month ago when I said he has had trench foot. Me and Lou got whooping cough, which seems a bit weird. We're just waiting for the other members of the band to get some crazy, bizarre illness."

Phoebe assures me that they're fully recovered from these strange medical complaints, which would condemn musicians of more fragile consti-

tutions to the bedroom, and reveals her eagerness to showcase their debut release, *Zurich*, to the likes of Brisbane when Alpine begin their East Coast EP launch in mid-February.

"It's great to go to different cities and explain our music to different people. We're quite a young band, so it's good to get out there and go to different towns, hopefully gain new fans and put on a really good show," Phoebe says, "Because it's our first tour we want to make it very special, so my mum is actually making outfits for Lou and I – she's a bit of a seamstress."

Phoebe reveals that while always being part of bands throughout high school, it wasn't until she and fellow vocalist Lou began collaborating with guitar teacher Christian that the entity now known

as Alpine truly started to take shape.

"We sporadically got together and worked some tracks, and eventually we got a band together and we started playing live. It was probably just over a year ago that we got the full band together. It's was a slow process at first, but now we're all the best of friends."

Despite the title of their EP fitting thematically with the name of the band, Phoebe explains that the idea for the title did not derive exactly from the Swiss city, but rather was inspired by more particular sentiments.

"We had this rehearsal space in Kensington in Melbourne in this amazing huge industrial warehouse and we called it Zurich. So every time we went to rehearsal, we were meeting at Zurich. So we decided that the EP would be appropriately named

after the place where we spent so much time getting all the tracks together."

Commenting on the different approaches employed by the band evident on *Zurich*, Phoebe provides some valuable insight into how particular songs come into existence, explaining that more often than not, songs rely on both fortunate circumstance and musical sincerity.

"We feel like we don't have a definite agreement on what the kind of sound we want to create [is]. It's kind of hard to describe – you just sense it when you felt like you've got the sound you want, or your own sound, I guess. All the songs have different vibes to them and it just kind of happened that way."

► **ALPINE** play **Alhambra** on **Thursday Feb 17**, supported by **Boy In A Box**. Their debut EP **ZURICH** is available through **Ivy League**. [www.myspace.com/alpineband](http://www.myspace.com/alpineband).

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**SHELLEY O'BRIEN**  
MELBOURNE UKULELE FESTIVAL SHOWCASE TOUR



## UKE & ME

**MATT JONES** chats to Canadian ukulele player and folk pop artist **SHELLEY O'BRIEN** about the upcoming Melbourne Ukulele Festival Tour.

**MATT JONES:** When preparing to speak to you, I was surprised to discover that the international ukulele community is so extensive!

**SHELLEY O'BRIEN:** It's a bit of an underground thing, but I'm going to change that.

**MJ:** Are you planning on bringing it to the mainstream?

**SO:** Well actually, to be honest... I don't think my music fits into the 'cutesy girl with ukulele' flock so much. It's just folk pop music that I happen to play with a ukulele, so in some ways I am hoping to bring it a little bit more mainstream, but it won't be by my power alone – there're so many great ukulele players out there who are better than me!

**MJ:** So you're touring with the Melbourne Ukulele Festival alongside a host of different players; have you ever met or listened to any of them before?

**SO:** Yeah actually, there's a great player from Belgium (Ukulelezaza) – he and I were very happy to find out we were going to be playing together. We played in Finland and Holland and France, so he and I are buddies now, we've been playing together for a couple of years. Paul Moore is another guy from Israel who has a great group of Jewish and Arab kids that play together as Ukuleles For Peace and it's his baby. So Paul and I have also met twice before, we met in Italy and in Finland as well, and I've also met Uni, so it's kind of a bit of a reunion! It's fantastic!

**MJ:** What are you looking forward to the most about coming to Australia?

**SO:** Can I just say the sunshine? Because I really have a vitamin D deficiency.

**MJ:** Going back a bit, what made you pick up the uke and start playing? How long ago was that?

**SO:** Well I started in 2006, so not that long ago. I was a jazz performer – a piano player on cruise ships – so I was sailing all over the world and I had a really small cabin, and I wanted to keep up with my songwriting but my arms were just aching after playing four hours of piano a night. It was a lot! So that's a practical reason for picking up the ukulele – it's small. But also I grew up going to Hawaii in the winter and so the ukulele has been part of my childhood. The sound of it was always so happy and beautiful to me. So that, and also it's a stringed instrument – I thought it would be a good challenge to start writing music on a different instrument and wow, it changed a lot for me.

**MJ:** So what's the next step for Shelley O'Brien?

**SO:** Well I'm finishing up an album right now, so this summer is releasing that album. Hopefully I'll be back to live in Canada and then go back to Europe in the fall and just keep going, keep writing, keep recording and keep touring. Keep playing uke. What else is there? Come to Australia every February, get a dog...

► **SHELLEY O'BRIEN** plays at **Brisbane Arts Theatre** on **Sunday Feb 20** as part of the **Melbourne Ukulele Festival (MUF) Showcase Tour**, alongside **Uni & Her Ukulele (USA)**, **Ukulelezaza (Belgium)**, **Paul Moore (Israel)**, **Jontom (Italy)** and more. Show starts at 7pm, with tickets from [www.greentix.com.au](http://www.greentix.com.au) or on the door. See [www.muf.org.au](http://www.muf.org.au) and [www.shelleyobrien.ca](http://www.shelleyobrien.ca) for more information.