

# Tank and the Bangas

## Bio



Photo credit: Gus Bennett Jr

Coming from New Orleans, Tank and the Bangas are surrounded by plenty of grand musical traditions. And the five-piece group has a rare knack for combining various musical styles—fiery soul, deft hip-hop, deep-groove R&B and subtle jazz—into one dazzling, cohesive whole that evokes the scope of New Orleans music while retaining a distinctive feel all its own.

“It’s music that can’t really be put in a box,” says singer and poet Tarriona “Tank” Ball. She fronts the band with vivid charisma that helped Tank and the Bangas win NPR’s 2017 Tiny Desk Concert Contest by unanimous acclaim, standing out among 6,000 entrants because of what Bob Boilen called “the depth of their lyricism and the versatility of their players.” Those same qualities also attracted the attention of Verve Records, which has signed the band.

Ball’s lyrical depth has been years in the making. She came up in the strong local slam poetry scene before meeting her bandmates: Merell Burkett on keyboards, Joshua Johnson on drums, Norman Spence on bass and synth keys and, eventually, Albert Allenback on alto sax and flute. “Growing up, I always could sing, but I wrote better than I sang, so I focused on writing,” she says. After her team won the National Poetry Slam Championship two years in a row, Ball turned her full attention to Tank and the Bangas.

What started as a loose collaboration at an open-mic night in 2011 has grown into a mesmerizing musical force that’s only picking up speed. After a featured set at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival early in the band’s career, the musicians built a reputation outside their hometown by

grinding it out on the road, honing their live show and releasing the 2013 album *Think Tank*, all the while converting audiences into passionate fans and garnering critical acclaim, from the *New Orleans Advocate* to *The New York Times*. “It made us work hard,” Ball says of playing Jazz Fest. “It made us want to feel deserving of it.”

Their hard work is paying off: The Huffington Post says Tank and the Bangas defy description onstage, adding, “It’s music that you have to experience.” The experience is subject to change from one night to the next.

“One show will feel very electronic, or hip-hop, and another show will feel slow and vibe-y and jazzy, and then another show will just be poetry and off-the-cuff riffs,” says Johnson. “As a band, we don’t like to hear ourselves do the same thing for too long, so we might change a small thing here or there, and if we change enough small things, it seems like a big change.”

Tank and the Bangas won the Tiny Desk contest with “Quick,” a riotous single they released in 2017 (and soon accompanied with a cheeky, not entirely safe-for-work video). There’s more new music where that came from as the group works on the follow-up to *Think Tank*. “It’s going to be awesome,” Ball says. “It’s going to be fun, and a little vulnerable at the same time.”

The band’s ongoing evolution involves more than just music: Ball continues to grow and develop as a performer and writer. Even back in the open-mic days, she was a force of nature. “I don’t know if there’s such a thing as too free, but it was totally uninhibited. She was inspired,” Spence says, laughing at the memory. More recently, Ball has become less of a dervish onstage—“I was running around so much I didn’t have time to sing at all,” she says—while finding new ways of expressing herself as a writer.

“I don’t just think about myself when I write now,” she says. “Just being with my bandmates taught me to think more about other people. And when you have an audience of people ready to listen to you, you’re excited to connect with them, you really are.”●

**For more information, please contact**

**Carla Sacks, Samantha Tillman or Louis D’Adamio at Sacks & Co., 212.741.1000,  
carla@sacksco.com, samantha.tillman@sacksco.com or louis.dadamio@sacksco.com.**