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Bio information: **HAPPY FAMILY**

Title: **MINIMAL GODS** (Cuneiform Rune 393) Format: CD / DIGITAL

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**FILE UNDER: ROCK / AVANT-PROGRESSIVE**

**A New Rock Music Emerges in Japan:  
Avant-rockers Happy Family Re-Emerge to Unleash *Minimal Gods*,  
an Album of Ferociously Beautiful, Hard-Rocking Compositions & Maximal Musical Inspiration**

*“Happy Family are undoubtedly the stars of the Japanese RIO [Rock in Opposition] / Zeuhl tradition, a band who’ve steeped themselves in this complex genre creating their own furiously excessive style.” –Audion*

Truly killer avant-garde rock bands—think **Battles**; think **Zevious**; **Ahleuchatistas**; **Upsilon Acrux**, **Many Arms** and **Dysrhythmia**;—all know the recipe for greatness: Two parts skill and discipline, one part inspired lunacy. On their third album, *Minimal Gods*, long-running Japanese instrumental quartet **Happy Family** seemingly take inspiration from these bands and more, as well as the 1970s **Rock in Opposition** movement, filter it all through their collective madness, and emerge with something utterly unique. These four ultra-talented players put their own wild spin on aggressive, instrumental rock over the course of 10 tracks, tossing metal, funk and even minimalism into the blender, and giving the results titles like “Cat Riding On Roomba.”

Happy Family’s self-titled **Cuneiform** debut appeared in 1995; it featured the lineup of **Kenchi Morimoto** (keyboards), **Shigeru Makino** (guitar), **Tatsuya Miyano** (bass) and **Keiichi Nagase** (drums). By the time they recorded 1997’s *Toscco*, Makino had been replaced by **Takahiro Izutani**, who remains with the group today. A single listen to *Minimal Gods* will reveal that they haven’t lost a step while they’ve been away. Indeed, their new compositions are the most energetic and aggressive of their career. This is bone-crunching but genuinely artful rock that feels joyful and alive at all times.

“Our all-new songs consist of a couple of short phrases,” explains guitarist Izutani. “Those phrases are played by each of the instruments depending on the stage of the song. We have put a kind of essence of minimal music into our songs. *Minimal Gods* is the symbolic expression of the essence.”

Don’t attach too much importance to the word “minimal,” though. These 10 tracks feature plenty of twists and turns, and a level of energy that recalls 70s jazz fusion pioneers like **Mahavishnu Orchestra** and **Return to Forever**. They launch forward with a speed and intensity that batters down resistance even as it thrills, and challenges fans to keep up. As the player with the most sonic options available to him, it’s frequently Morimoto who throws the most forceful curve balls at the listener, shifting from Hammond organ sounds to sci-fi zaps and zooms as the band hammers home an almost headbang-worthy riff behind him.

The album begins with “**Slide**,” a metallic track driven by a neck-snapping Nagase drumbeat, a massive Miyano bassline, sheets of jagged guitar from Izutani and discordant keyboard stabs from Morimoto. Solos are brief but blindingly intense, always leading back to that furious, driving backbeat and fuzzed-out bass riff. As the album’s first half continues, tracks like “**Rodrigo**” and “**Portal Sight for Sightseeing**” stretch into more melodic, even funky territory, without ever losing the power of their attack. In the disc’s second half, “**Cat Riding On Roomba**” has a quirky complexity like **Dream Theater** covering **Frank Zappa**, while “**Tibidabo**” offers hard, electric piano-driven funk that recalls Return to Forever or **Santana** at his jazziest. *Minimal Gods* concludes with “**Feu de Joie**,” an even more Zappa-esque piece that travels from slow-crawling near-metal to herky-jerky prog, with stinging guitar work from Izutani, and finally ends with a liquid, **Pink Floyd**-style keyboard coda.

The changes Happy Family have undergone since 1997’s *Toscco* can be seen in the visual presentation of *Minimal Gods* as powerfully as they can be heard in its sound. Where the first two albums featured scratchy hand-drawn art, the new album comes wrapped in beautiful photographs of a Japanese forest. As Izutani explains, “There is an artificially arranged forest around **Meiji Jingu Shrine**. The forest was designed to develop into a beautiful shape in the future at the beginning of the construction plan. Now the forest around Meiji Jingu Shrine is one of the most beautiful forests in Japan. It seems like a huge Bonsai...Our composition on *Minimal Gods* is also planned to develop. We composed and designed our songs in detail with some simple materials from the beginning, and the songs will become altered and finally make a beautiful shape organically through many times of playing. The forest of Meiji Jingu Shrine is the symbol for our style of composition.”

This November, Happy Family will retake their rightful place in the global art-rock pantheon, presenting new and old material at the first-ever **Rock in Opposition Festival** to be held in Japan. They’ll be performing alongside legends of the international **RiO** movement (many of whom are Cuneiform labelmates) including Belgium’s **Present** (Cuneiform), France’s **Richard Pinhas** (Cuneiform), Sweden’s **Mats/Morgan Band** (Cuneiform), and the UK’s **Artaud Beats** (featuring former **Henry Cow** drummer **Chris Cutler**), as well as Japanese acts **Kouenji Hyakkei** and **Le Silo**.

*For more information on Happy Family:*  
www.facebook.com/HappyFamily.music - www.cuneiformrecords.com

*“One of the few experimental metal/Magma/Crimzo-oriented bands which has actually advanced the form since, say, Heldon’s 1978 masterpiece STAND BY or Present’s latest, Happy Family...pretty well stuns me.” –Tone Clusters*

### **PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS**

Digital [High-Resolution] versions of these images are available for download on the Happy Family artist page @ www.cuneiformrecords.com



**Cuneiform asked Takahiro Izutani of Happy Family to talk to us about Minimal Gods. Here’s what he said (with various Happy Family members contributing info on song titles):**

#### ***What does the album name Minimal Gods mean to you?***

All of our new songs consist of a couple of short phrases. These phrases are played by each instrument, at various stages of the song. We’ve put into our songs a kind of essence of minimal music. *Minimal Gods* is the symbolic expression of that essence.

That is the biggest difference from our previous compositional style. We’re no longer only pursuing the Zeuhl sound. 15 years after our last album, we used the name of our new musical concept for our new album to indicate our present attitude.

#### ***How did you determine the titles for each TRACK?***

##### **1. “Slide”**

I (Izutani) expressed the visual image of walking, of the walking movement of the Geometer moth's larva, in this song. The rhythm of “Slide” is not complicated. But the accent is placed at strange position so that the listener would hear it as an intricate rhythm pattern. It is thus like the movement of the Geometer moth's larva.

##### **2. “No talent, no smell”**

I (Morimoto) composed this song, and derived the title from a motto cherished by one of my friends. Whenever my friend came up against a difficulty, he made an effort to remember: "Should be no talented, should be no smelled". That saying means that "there is no advantage to stand out, so I will try not to be prominent". I was deeply impressed with that, so I extracted the keywords of this motto and used them as my song title.

##### **3. “Rodrigo”**

“Rodrigo” is a kind of tribute song to Spanish composer Joaquín Rodrigo Vidre. I (Izutani) recently became interested in Spanish music, which I hold in great esteem. I made a song reflecting the influence I draw from many kinds of Spanish music.

##### **4. “Portal site for sightseeing”**

I (Izutani) always enjoy looking at websites for booking flights or hotels, and websites that feature travel guides and tours. This song expresses the excitement I feel whenever I'm planning travel.

##### **5 “Doggy-Human contest”**

This song is composed by Morimoto. There is a famous TV program called Bird Human Contest:

[<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2Arfn53CiE>] But what if there was a Doggy-Human Contest, what would it be like?

I (Morimoto) imagined the setting for such a TV program, and composed that fictitious program’s main theme.

##### **6. “Animal Spirit”**

[[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Animal\\_spirits\\_%28Keynes%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Animal_spirits_%28Keynes%29)]

“Animal spirits” is the term John Maynard Keynes used in his 1936 book, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* to describe the instincts, proclivities and emotions that ostensibly influence and guide human behavior, and which can be measured in terms of, for example, consumer confidence. It has since been argued that trust is also included in or produced by "animal spirits". The strength and fast beat of this song express ambitious will that is not explained by rational reason. We put an importance on that kind of will in creating music or in proceeding with some plan.

##### **7. “Cat riding on Roomba”**

I (Izutani) was into watching many YouTube videos of pretty cats on when I was composing this song.

[[https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=cat+riding+roomba](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=cat+riding+roomba)] So I named the song as “Cat riding Roomba.” It doesn't mean much but I always remember the pretty cat whenever I play this song.

## 8. “Celestial illegal construction”

“Celestial illegal construction” is composed by Morimoto, who was inspired by this bizarre construction:

[<http://jp.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887324823804579013420884670990>] He composed the song by using the image of the construction as a motif.

## 9. “Tibidabo”

“Tibidabo” refers to Tibidabo amusement park in Barcelona, Spain. I (Izutani) visited there last year, and I shaped my fun memory of Tibidabo into a song.

## 10. “Feu de joie”

“Feu de joie” means “shots of joy” in French. When I (Izutani) was composing this song, the Arab Spring revolution occurred in Egypt. After the success of the revolution, soldiers celebrated it with gun shots of joy. But many of the bullets shot in the sky injured or killed people who were located far from the soldiers. I saw the TV news that alternated images of smiling soldiers and those of fallen civilians. The song “Feu de joie” expresses the mixture of contradiction, disorder, rapture, anger and ludicrousness that I felt at that time.

### *Anything special about the COVER ART?*

The front and back cover art of *Minimal Gods* was shot at Meiji Jingu Shrine.

There is an artificially arranged forest around Meiji Jingu Shrine. The forest was designed to develop into a beautiful shape in the future at the beginning of the construction plan. Now the forest around Meiji Jingu Shrine is one of the most beautiful forests in Japan. It seems like a huge Bonsai.

In a similar way, our compositions on *Minimal Gods* were planned to develop over time. We compose and design the songs in detail with some simple materials from the beginning. And then, organically, through playing them many times, the songs alter and finally assume a beautiful shape. The forest of Meiji Jingu Shrine is the symbol for our style of composition.

### WHAT THE PRESS HAS SAID ABOUT HAPPY FAMILY’S PREVIOUS RELEASES ON CUNEIFORM:

#### HAPPY FAMILY BAND

#### *Toscco*

#### Cuneiform

1997

**“Happy Family are undoubtedly the stars of the Japanese RIO/Zeuhl tradition, a band who’ve steeped themselves in this complex genre, creating their own furiously excessive style. Whereas Bondage Fruit and Koenji tend to lack an artistic balance, Happy Family seem to get it all in the right proportion. Take one part RIO... one part Zeuhl... add Japanese technicality, and a stronger rock edge... and we get a Happy Family!... their debut live cassette was greeted with amazement, and their eponymous CD even more so. On TOSCCO they took their style of fusion on to new territory, all the more complex on a progressive rock level, leading me to wonder where they’ll go next.”**  
- Alan Freeman, *Audion* January 1997

**“...RIO (Rock in opposition) is a complex style... [characterized by] the exploding mixture of Art-Rock, Classic music and Jazz-Fusion... Happy Family throw in also, for the first time in the history of the genre, heavy metal, [and] Prog-Metal.”**  
- Uzbekistan Progressive Rock Pages

**“The playing is tight and fierce, a crushing sound relatively unchanged since their first release... They don’t need a lot of time to make their point. The intensity is still over the top, but it’s tempered...”**  
- *Music Uncovered*, Issue #28, 1997

**“...try to get your bearings while the Family’s onslaught of academic virtuosity bombards the molecules in your room. I still have no idea what the heck’s going on here, but I’ve had a fine time failing to understand.”**  
- *Popwatch*, No. 9

**“...a band influenced by the likes of Magma, Univers Zero and heavy metal. ... the music is loud, raucous, and uncompromising. ... the drive is similar[to Magma]. However, while Vander’s inspiration comes from Coltrane, Nagase’s seems to come from Black Sabbath. ‘The Sushi Bar’ begins quietly – almost like a Brechtian ballad – but soon expands into a fierce and tricky tirade. ... this visceral music is intriguing and grows with every listen.”**  
- *Option*, #76, Sept. Oct. 1997

**“This quartet formed in Tokyo... and has become popular with RIO pro-rock fans all over the world. Influenced by bands such as Magma, Ruins, Univers Zero, and King Crimson, they play a hyper-aggressive form of rock. ... Odd New Wave keyboards, out-of-tune bass, and an anarchic drummer almost disguise the incredibly complicated nature of the tunes. Imagine Minor Threat opening for Mahavishnu Orchestra. ... fusion for the 90s, but... about as far as can be from your average jazz-rock band. Whatever you call it, it’s good, visceral, odd-metered fun.”**  
- Dom, *Ground and Sky*

**“Happy Family have done their damndest to continue to progress and explore their sound. They’ve... decided to take their Japanese blend of Zeuhl and RIO and create a new slant. ... it covers far more ground while retaining certain aspects of their sound. ... their use of percussion, which adds a softer note to that intensity, and... they’ve spaced things out more. ... Cuneiform and Happy Family do it again – definitely recommended.”**  
- Mike McLatchey, *Exposé*, Issue No. 12, Spring 1997

“Happy Family’s [second]... shows them **reaching out and covering a lot of new territory. ... the band is developing their own unique voice.** ... One notable addition to their sound is the use of synths for effects... and also a tendency to utilize more subdued and purely melodic passages within their compositions as contrast for their trademark manic harder edged moments. ... **What Toscco shows is growth, not stagnation.**”  
- Peter Thelen, Roundtable Review, *Exposé*, Issue No. 12, Spring 1997

“Happy Family attracted a lot of attention with their debut album... because **they are one of the few (if not the only) contemporary bands to play progressive rock with such a high level of energy and aggression.** ... Happy Family writes intricate compositions that incorporate tricky rhythms, dissonant harmonies, and LOUD drums and guitar. ... The punk rock association is merely a matter of intensity. ... **This Japanese combo has once again delivered a shock to the progressive music world.** The instrumental inventiveness and aggressiveness of this band are things that must be heard to be believed. **Highly recommended.**”

- Steve Robey, Roundtable Review, *Exposé*, Issue No. 12, Spring 1997

“Toscco”...features 9 instrumental tracks...of **high-powered avant-garde rock with manic, fast playing, countless time changes and dark atmospheres influenced by the works of Henry Cow, Univers Zero, Magma, UK and King Crimson (“Red” period).** This is... a piece of **immaculately played heavy, complex avant-garde rock** for fans of the aforementioned legendary bands. These guys mean business!  
- *The Psychedelic Magazine*, Issue No. 14

“...this is a worthwhile release. The second album starts with The Great Man, a heavy menacing track, kind of slow and building to erupt into Overdrive Locomotive, a fast paced, almost metallic track with heavy bass sound, complicated rhythms and well... it’s manic. ... the track thunders on. ... The thanks that the band put in their booklet include Dr. Nerve and II Berlione and this should more or less indicate the kind of music the band makes. **Hard edged, driven, fusionish progressive rock of the complicated and quirky kind, well executed and more importantly, sensibly composed. References can also be made to such bands as Tipographica... and of course the biggest of them all: King Crimson. No compromises as this band takes it further and they do it with flair.**”  
- Jurriaan Hage, *Axiom of Choice*, June 1997

“...this sophomore effort **delivers on all of the first release’s promises. ... Happy Family concentrate here on distilling only the most original aspects of their debut CD’s sound while teasing out entirely new trajectories of operation.** ... Hardly any traces of Magma remain. Happy Family still pummel you just as hard as that French band can, but here their facility at continuously chopping and lurching, combined with a newfound penchant for Zappa-esque jazziness, place them close at times to... Tipographica. At other times elements of Red-era Crimson resurface, as do references to...Area, but **these influences have now been wholly integrated into a fully formed and highly individual voice. Toscco is a real find.**”

- Eric Lumbleau, *Alternative Press Magazine*, Vol. 12, No. 112, November 1997

“*Exposé Writers Top Ten of 1997*... [in top 10 list of critics] Mike Grimes [#2 Happy Family–Toscco]... Mike McLatchey [#5 Happy Family—Toscco]... Dan Casey [#7 Happy Family—Toscco]... Steve Robey [#8 Happy Family—Toscco].” - *Exposé*, Issue No. 15

“**Not one track on this CD is even closely similar to anything I have heard before.** ... every song is unpredictable, meaning that as soon as you get used to the current theme, it explodes off in a different direction, leaving the listener totally baffled and gobsmacked... **it’s certainly groundbreaking stuff.**”  
-Derek Daniel, *Stormbringer*

“**One of the few experimental metal/Magma/Crimzo-oriented bands which has actually advanced the form since, say, Heldon’s 1978 masterpiece STAND BY or Present’s latest, Happy Family is a Japanese quartet whose second CD (this one) pretty well stuns me.** ... they don’t look down on their own ethnic musical background; one example of many is the calmly meandering Eastern-tinged alto saxophone melody in “The Great Man.” ... With the usual Cruel Splice...technology that Cuneiform bands are known for, “Overdrive Locomotive” takes off immediately thereafter. ... “The Sushi Bar”’s calm opening piano soon shatters into Webern-like fragments. ... No larded serious knit brows for this crew; **they’re one of the few bands who... have fun doing this kind of highly structured weirdness. Kind of like Dr. Nerve covering the 1973 Crimson STARLESS AND BIBLE BLACK album.**”

- *Tone Clusters*, May/June 1998

“*Alltime Top 10±x* ... [Number] 8 Happy Family.”- Andreas Gfall, *Prog Reviews*

“**Happy Family have widened... to take in more experimental influences along with some elements of Japanese folk music.** ‘The Great Man’ opens the album with a heavy treatment of what sounds like a Japanese folk theme and then rushes in ‘Overdrive Locomotive’ which is typical Happy Family – **incredibly high energy, excellent bass (well produced again) and superb percussion.** The real change from the previous album begins with ‘Nord Company vs. Lead Company’ though – much more playful and willing to try new things... Whereas before, the forward impetus tended to obscure detail a little, Happy Family have found it possible to concentrate on details... They are now one of the Japanese bands whose new releases I will automatically buy. Great music on this album.”  
-Phil Kime, *Gibraltar V7 #20*, August 1997

## HAPPY FAMILY BAND

## Happy Family

## Cuneiform

## 1995

“Most draw comparisons to Magma, Univers Zero, and (Red-era) King Crimson, and I’d have to agree... Throw in some heavy metal, some RIO-inspired complexity, some Japanese goofiness, and away we go. **These guys play with a lot of energy. Rhythms are often very complicated 16<sup>th</sup>-note patterns, but the band never loses a step... it sounds deliberate and under control... it’s the musical equivalent of the Tasmanian Devil.** It’s fun to watch it and laugh at it, but I’d [sic] wouldn’t want to get in its way... **this is**

**uncompromisingly creative hard prog rock...** Fans of Doctor Nerve and others who play the ultra-heavy near-RIO style will... enjoy this one.”  
-Jack Brandon, *Ground and Sky*

“Though there’s always been a preference for the kind of rock knitted by the European free form/RIO contingent, the batch of albums Cuneiform have released in 1995 are nothing if not eclectic-rock with a wry twist, jazz ran through an experimental squeezer...here’s this year’s bumper crop:

**Happy Family.** Word of mouth and a host of cassettes have given some notoriety to this corrosive progressive quartet in underground circles over the past year. **This debut CD surpasses their reputation.** Skewered blasts of noisome, *Red* metal shatters through rough-and-tumble landscapes of shuddering percussion, ominous, gravelly basslines and wheezing synths. **An all-instrumental bulldozer of an album that doesn’t just redirect Crimson’s current-it nukes the circuit.**”  
-Darren Bergstein, *Music in Flux*

**“Exposé Writer’s Choices for 1995** [Happy Family in top 10 list of critics:] Dan Casey - #3 Happy Family–*Happy Family*

Peter Thelen - #8 Happy Family–*Happy Family*

Rob Walker - #7 Happy Family–*Happy Family*

Mike Ohman - #3 Happy Family–*Happy Family*

Mike Grimes - #4 Happy Family–*Happy Family*

Mike McLatchey - #5 Happy Family–*Happy Family*

Paul Earney - #5 Happy Family–*Happy Family*

–*Exposé*

## FEATURES, ARTICLES, INTERVIEWS

“Artist Spotlight: Happy Family.” –Dan Casey, *Exposé (USA)*, #7 Summer 1995.

“Zeuhl, Part 4 – Zeuhl Around the World.” –Alan Freeman, *Audion (England)*, January 1997.

“Interview mit Happy Family.” –S.L., *Progressive Newsletter (Germany)*, #17 November 1997.

“Happy Family Interview.” –*ArchAngel (Japan)*, #9. 1995.

Mentioned in “Alternative Pop.” –*Marquee*, #69 (Japan). December 1996.

Mentioned in article. –*Pick Up Artists, Marquee (Japan)*, June 1995.

“Happy Family: La Rebelión Nipona.” –Rafa Dorado, *Margen (Spain)*, #4. 1995.

“A Invasão Japonesa.” –Marcos Oliveira, *Revista Slammin (Brazil)*, #3, Ano. 1. 1997.

“...Upon Keiichi Nagase’s entry into Happy Family...the band jettisoned their past and moved toward a darker *Zeuhl*-inspired chamber-rock direction which was fermenting...around a triumvirate of groups of that ilk...

Ironically, despite all the ground-swell of interest in this aggressive prog-rock direction, Nagase admits, ‘**There was no Japanese label willing to release our first CD** right away. But how about a foreign label... figuring this was a bit farfetched we nevertheless sent off a tape to **Cuneiform in America. Lo and behold they liked the music enough to secure the release of our first two albums** so far’...

**The hard-hitting Magma/Univers Zero-inspired concoction of Happy Family’s debut CD erupts in a smoldering volcano of odd meters and tricky unison riffing to throw you off your footing. Beneath the surface, this chamber-progressive rock music reveals a quirky edge, capturing a fine blending of dark harmony and exotic melodic forms, propelled by Nagase’s aggressive muscular approach.** His sense of syncopation recalls perhaps Terry Bozzio...

**Imagine if you were to lock a metal band in a room for five years allowing them to listen to nothing but Frank Zappa and King Crimson, then turn them loose. The resulting white-hot surge cuts with a razor-sharp edge through a blistering set of nine instrumentals. Its sense of liberation is akin to the release of a caged animal.** Nagase displays some brilliant ideas on percussion, the way he incorporates his whole kit into the Mosaic-like patchwork, adding complementing color and textural flourishes to the din via cowbells, roto-tom rims, and bells. His breakneck, breakneck-speed monster drumming leaves the rest of the band to catch up. This quartet is tighter than a son-of-a-b\*\*\*\*!!

... **Happy Family has the distinction of being one of the first independent Japanese progressive bands to break out of the ghetto and achieve international recognition.**”

–Mike Ezzo, “Keiichi Nagase: International Drum Scene, Dateline: Japan,” *Drummer Dude Magazine* Nov. 1997