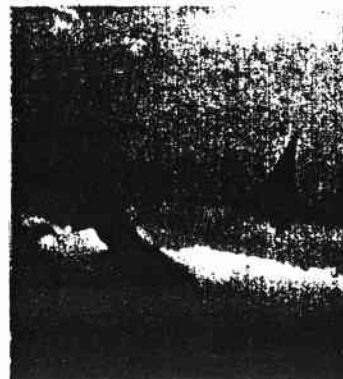


the endless zen



abq

Where's a wave when you need one? Wild Life tells you how to throw a beach party in New Mexico. Just turn the page.



The Mermen, the Ventures of the '90s, ride the gnarly instrumental surf-rock tube to ABQ for three nights. Gidget isn't invited.

By Elaine Beebe
TRIBUNE REPORTER

Instrumental music permeates the soul much more effortlessly than music with words.

Think of a symphony or a classical guitar or really solid jazz. They can fill a room, take it over subtly without ever noticeably intruding. Since there are no words to process, the emotion that drives the music surges the soul, with barely a ripple through the brain.

Such is the effect of the Mermen's surf-inspired instrumentals, which tap into the epic force of the ocean. It's the sound of losing yourself in the trance of crashing waves on a quiet beach: hypnotically powerful.

All that Zen with a guitar, bass and drums.

"The energy from not speaking comes out through the body," says guitarist Jim Thomas, explaining

why Mermen music is so intense.

Hold on.

Wait a minute.

This is all getting far too New Age. I'm getting the creeps.

So I defer to Thomas. "New Age? Yeah, Yanni wanted to be in the band, but we wouldn't let him," he jokes.

"The cool thing about making music with no words is that people have more to figure out. It's just music," he says more normally, sounding more like a San Francisco surfer-guy than a crazy captain of the crystals.

Thomas' tone parallels the Mermen musical attitude, which is firmly based in the California surf-rock tradition. The sunny, sandy, flip-down-the-convertible pop of the early '60s. Twangy Stratocasters, undulating melodies, tribal backbeats. Background music for the endless summer.

The Ventures, *not* the Beach Boys.

Dick Dale, not Gidget.

But the songs on the Mermen's self-produced debut CD, "Food for Other Fish," far transcend the genre with their languid sensuality and technical precision. "Surf music is our jump-off point, but there's a much, much deeper expression," is how bassist Allen Whitman describes the Mer-music. "It's more aggressive, has a more original approach and doesn't rely on kitsch or gimmicks."

Whitman adds that the first album he ever bought was the Surfaris' "Wipeout." "I was 11, and it was in a supermarket, but I don't know why. I was 11."

During the past five years, the thirtysomething Mermen have played with surf legends like Tom Curren and Dick Dale, alternative bands like

Who?

The Mermen.

When?

9:30 p.m.
Friday,
Saturday,
Sunday.

Where?

The Dingo
Bar, 313 Gold
Ave. S.W.,
243-0663

Tickets

\$5

Please see **MERMEN/D12**

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Tips for an Albuquerque beach party:

■ Shark expert Rodney Fox heads below the surface in a clear plastic diving tube. Fox, the story goes, once received 462 stitches after he was attacked by a great white in 1963.

Fox must be a fun guy at parties. The Mermen would like Fox.

Another ocean-going Natural History Museum exhibit is Deep Sea Treasures.

Among the treasures: A display about sonar, a replica of the Avin, the Navy's deep-diving research submarine, plus old coins, jars, weaponry and tools recovered from shipwrecks.

For information, call 841-8837.

And remember, when it comes to sharks: Don't dangle your feet over the edge of the board.

the Beach Boys. For the verbally disciplined, the Ventures.

■ For a hipper, on-the-edge crowd, try Agent Orange. They do a killer version of "Pipeline."

■ When a stupor is reached, grab the Don Ho records, the Frank Sinatra of the islands.

■ When you want the party to end, lay in "Balboa Funzone," by the Adolescents. The first chorus goes: "There's a riot, riot, riot at the beach."

■ Fill the tub with cold water and add 5 pounds of salt. Jump in for a good time. For a true beach experience, add a cup of

ming (cont.)

■ A flushed toilet can sound like waves breaking on the beach. Soothing.

■ Stand close to a heat lamp, allow skin to blister. The pinkish new skin you'll have three days later is mondo cool.

■ If it's raining, grab your board and head for the arroyo. "Surf Embudo!"

■ Make up surfer nicknames for you and all your friends. "I want to be Moondoggie." "Can I be Woody?" "I want to be Surf Daddy."

■ Visit our own beach, appropriately called The Beach. You might want to wait until late spring, when it actually opens.

■ We have the sand. Don't worry about the goatheads; they take the place of glass shards that litter California beaches.

■ Pick out the appropriate music: Start with some rockin' tunes. Try manly man Dick Dale. He shreds!

Or, for an older crowd, try



MERMEN from D11

Midnight Oil and "the nastiest thrash bands," Thomas says. They've even toured Japan. But their most memorable show? The answer comes in a flash.

"Tiny Tim," Thomas and Whitman chorus.

"An hour and 10 minutes solid of pop hits from Great Britain and America from the 1920s," Thomas recites properly.

"Everyone was riveted. The high point was 'Tiptoe Through the Tulips.' People stood up and went crazy," Whitman says. "Martyn (Jones, the drummer) and I backed him up without any clue what he was going to play. He'd just say, 'Maestro, in the key of G'" — Whitman does a flowery falsetto — "and go. We'd look at each other and just follow along."

"Yeah, we've played with Dick Dale, who's the manliest man on Earth, and then there's Tiny Tim. The polar opposite," Thomas says.

The Mermen have amassed some-

what of a cult following far outside their San Francisco home, without a record deal or outward promotion. Two weeks ago, their CD release party at San Francisco's Bottom of the Hill sold out and had an hour-and-a-half waiting line. "It's all word-of-mouth," Thomas says.

Kinda like the booking of the Mermen at the Dingo. It seems that BellyAcher Ryan Martino swung the Dingo's Miguel Corrigan a Mermen tape. Corrigan flipped, called them up and booked them for a weekend on the spot. Thomas doesn't find this *too* odd, simply commenting, "Three nights — that's high praise." He adds that Mer-people from L.A. and San Fran are piling into cars and hopping on planes for the Albuquerque shows and that he has 400 or 500 bootlegs of Mermen shows stashed away. all

sent to him by fans.

Something else to look for at the Dingo show: super-groovy Mermen posters designed by the King of Haight Street. Artist Ron Donovan has made bright, beautifully trippy posters for all the big Mermen shows. Whitman adds that some of Donovan's Mermen posters decorate a San Francisco apartment in the upcoming film, "Interview With a Vampire."

"They pan the room really slow, and there they are," he says. "They used hundreds of them during filming."

The future for the Mermen brings a 35-date European tour in the fall. Thomas' dream tour? Again, no hesitation.

"New Zealand.

"I've been there to surf, but not to play."

Go fish:

In honor of the Mermen's visit to our fair, arid state, the Happy Eater has compiled a list of oceanic eating experiences, sure to make your week go swimmingly:

■ Seagull Street (5401 Academy Road N.E.) still reigns as the most seaworthy restaurant this side of the Pacific Ocean. Best selection, freshest catch and a nautical-beachy ambience add to this Neptunian night. Deck seating is open, weather permitting.

■ Maine-Ly Lobster (6220 San Mateo Blvd. N.E.) serves up the absolute freshest lobster available in the state. The restaurant uses its own planes to ship the luscious crustaceans from Down East.

■ For the more adventurous, try El Pescado Mojado (1411 Isleta Blvd. S.W.). This tiny, unassuming South Valley hang-out serves Baja-style spicy seafood and lots of it. Bring a translator.



E-TRIBE

For more restaurant reviews, see The Electronic Trib, our computerized news service. Details on Page A2.