

# TRENDS

# Surf's Up



The Aqua Velvets



The Mermen

Surf music, long buried in the deep, blue sea, is riding a comeback wave.

BY RAOUL HERNANDEZ

"We've gotten letters from all over the world," says Mermen guitarist Jim Thomas from his Ocean Beach, California home, overlooking the cold waters of the San Francisco Bay. "Letters from people in Thailand saying how much this music means to them."

This may not seem so strange at first—lots of bands get fan mail, even from such exotic locales—but Thomas and his fellow Mermen traffic in a genre long presumed dead: surf music. You know, Dick Dale, the Ventures—surf music, with the long, twanging, tremoloed runs and crashing cymbal breakers. But this isn't your father's surf: the Mermen's music has a strong undercurrent of Jimi Hendrix, Neil Young and other Seventies rockers.

"I'm just pulling from the soup of all that's out there," says Thomas. "I'm not even consciously choosing surf music; it just comes out that way. I've lived next to the ocean my whole life. That's where my inspiration came from—living around the ocean, surfing, walking, reading on the beach. It didn't come out of me trying to imitate any kind of music." Nevertheless, the Mermen share enough, soundwise, with classic surf music to please closet fans of the original. They also will appeal to guitar heads looking for something new in between Joe Satriani and Eric Johnson releases. In fact, the Mermen have the potential to hit like a tidal wave pounding Japan.

Even now that wave is rushing towards the shore. Director Quentin Tarantino's use of surf music in the film *Pulp Fiction* and its subsequent soundtrack has created a new round of interest. Quick to catch on has been Southern California's Del-Fi label, which released *Pulp Surfin'* to draw attention to its extensive back catalog of surf music, and AVI, with its two-volume-and-promising-more series, *Rare Surf: The South Bay Bands*. More important to this revival is the signing of the Mermen and their Bay Area neighbors The Aqua Velvets to Mesa/Bluemoon, a division of Atlantic Records. With majors in the water, it's likely that other current surfers like Laika & The Cosmonauts will be snapped up by labels with enough money to market a trend. And a trend it seems sure to become.

"Surf music is ready to barf all over the place," says Thomas bluntly. "Everyone and their mother who was playing blues is now playing surf instrumentals, and with all the reissues, I think there's gonna be a huge proliferation of instrumental music, period."