

San Francisco Examiner



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Surf music's new wave

S.F.'s Mermen rise [B-1]



Young? Grbac?

Who'll be healthier on Sunday? [C-1]



ELECTION '95

Vote shows broad base for Brown

avez

Slim margin doesn't tell whole story: Ex-speaker won at

U.S. budget battle hits crisis point

HEART-TO-HEART ENCOUNTER



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By David
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EXAMINER PHOTOS BY BOB McLEOD

odin gallery is one of the best spaces in the United States for sculpture.

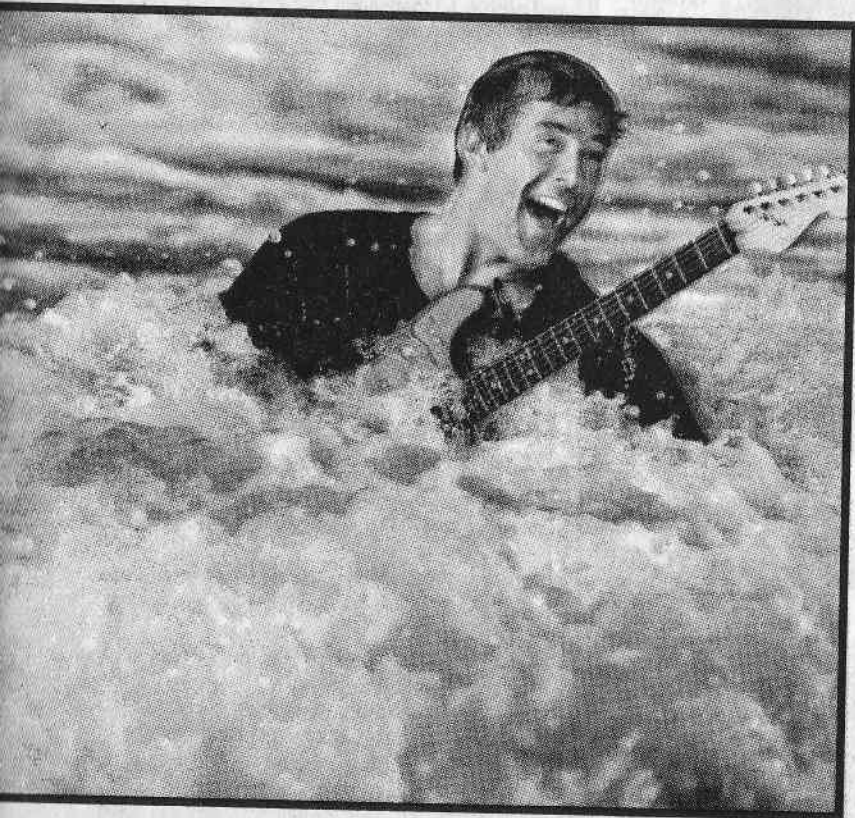
retrofitting and underground expansion will not only find a marvelously renovated building and beautifully reinstalled galleries, but a museum devoted to European culture that is far better than what they might have remembered.

A lot of ink has been spilled and words wasted on the Legion's standing. The Legion is not the greatest American museum in terms of either the quality or quantity of its collection. But neither is it the mediocrity many Bay Area sophisticates have dismissed over the years. Chief curator Steven Nash has accurately ranked it at the top of the second tier of American museums — and that's not so bad.

That means that you won't find in it the paintings of certain crucial

[See *LEGION*, B-11]

► **FRIDAY:** David Bonetti reviews the opening exhibitions at the Legion of Honor.



EXAMINER/CHRIS HARDY

Thomas and his band, the Mermen, are the top local purveyors of surf music.

The Mermen on the verge of catching a big one

By Jane Ganahl

OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

The angel of success may be courting Jim Thomas and his band, the Mermen, with recording contracts, gigs at major venues and a new national fan base, but maid service clearly ain't included in the deal.

"I've been living here seven years — you can tell by the rug. There are things growing in there now," laughs San Francisco's own king of surf guitar, perusing the shambles of his Ocean Beach apartment.

It's a toss-up over which is more likely to cause a visitor to trip: three surfboards in the entry, umpteen guitars in the living room, or the ever-growing piles of posters and news clippings for the Mermen, who, after laboring for years in relative obscurity, are finally on the brink of a national break-through. (Thursday night, they play the Warfield with the Boston group Morphine.)

"We've been doing good on every front, and have achieved some momentum," says the modest Thomas,

who is backed by fellow Mer-persons Allen Whitman on bass and Martyn Jones on drums. "Now we have this record deal and our records are being sold all over the country. We've played all these shows — four shows at the Fillmore this year. We have just built and built and built and now we have a pretty solid base."

The leap in notoriety is well-deserved. The Mermen have taken the genre of surf music — wordless, reverberated, evoking the sound inside a wave — to a new level. Their most recent CD, "A Glorious Lethal Euphoria," contains 72 minutes of searing guitar bliss wrapped in psychedelia.

Mesa, a division of Atlantic Records, bought the album and it's now being distributed by WEA, Warner-Electra-Atlantic, the biggest distributor in the world.

But Thomas, unlike most ego-driven guitarists of some reknown, refuses to accept credit for the Mermen's growing fame. "I don't really understand what I'm doing so the credit goes to somebody else, somewhere beyond

[See *MERMEN*, B-7]

◆ *MERMEN* from B-1

Mermen set to catch a big wave

me. The music just happens, and I only have a little to do with it. I try to compare it to surfing, not on a small day but on a big day. You have to develop certain skills to deal with it, but all you can do is influence what happens."

Thomas, who at 42 looks more like a healthy football player than a guitar god, better get used to the title. As "A Glorious Lethal Euphoria" widens its circulation, the reviews are rolling in.

"Thomas will be a reluctant guitar hero, but he will be one nonetheless," raves one critic from Texas. "Catch him right now because he's doing it first and so far, best."

Another refers to Thomas' "intensely ugly feedback-laden tones" — which Thomas takes as a huge compliment — and says he is less comparable to early surf guitar whiz Dick Dale than to the Jimmys: Page and Hendrix.

The band is less interested in the critics' opinions, though, than the fans. And that club is growing. The band has sold out most of its recent gigs, "Glorious Lethal Euphoria" is high on the request lists of indie rock stations like KUSF, and fan letters are rolling in.

"It really feels like the music is reaching people," says Thomas, selecting one letter from the box. "This one says this guy had a terminal illness and you helped me get better. This other says the music makes them feel like they're 'somebody.' It's great that they are rebounding on such a personal level."

Fame is also bringing some strangeness. "Oh God, we got



EXAMINER/CHRIS H

Mermen guitarist Jim Thomas lounges amid the main objects of his affections.

asked to play this big 'Baywatch' party here, and found ourselves on the stage with David Hasselhoff," marvels Thomas, eyes wide. "It was awesomely stupid."

What would success look like to the zen-like Thomas? "I've never really cared about monetary success, but I would like to make enough of a living that I could have a family. Also, to be able to be content amidst all the trial and tribulation. And just to keep playing and surfing anytime I wanted."

Environmentalist Begley quits posts

ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES — "St. Elsewhere" star Ed Begley Jr., one of Hollywood's leading environmentalists, resigned two environmental posts in disgust.

"I've become my own worst nightmare, a petty bureaucrat shuffling papers as the ancient forests are destroyed, the frogs perish

and the coral reefs die off," he s

He resigned this week as chairman of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and as a member of the city's Environmental Affairs Commission. Both were unpaid positions.

San Francisco Examiner

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DOWNTOWN

ST. FRANCIS I & II Market bet 5-6th St

- ☐ DEVIL IN BLUE DRESS 11:10, 2:45, 6:20, 9:55
- ☐ CLUELESS 1:00, 4:35, 8:05
- ☐ SHOWGIRLS 11:00, 3:20, 7:40
- ☐ TO WONG FOO 1:20, 5:40, 9:55

DISTRICT THEATERS

ALHAMBRA Polk/Union, 7 Bargain Matinee 1st Two Shows

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