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## Surf's up: Catch the sound waves of Thomas and his Mermen

You can almost feel the electricity shooting out of **Jim Thomas** when he starts talking about it: a 10-story-high wave.

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He's not a crazy enough surfer to try to tackle the 30- to 40-footers that were regularly pounding Half Moon Bay — just south of San Francisco — on Nov. 21, nor the (perhaps embellished) gigantic "rogue wave" that lashed the surfing spot called Mavericks; still, just imagining it had him trying to decide whether to grab his surfboard or his guitar. "A hundred-foot wave! Can you believe it?" he asks, from his San Francisco home, a few blocks from the ocean.

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While it may not be quite as thrilling as riding a 100-foot wave, listening to Thomas and his **Mermen** is quite a mad aural rush. This underrated band is one of the true treasures of current rock music; it has a blissfully unique sound, with complex compositions that flow like water, sometimes smooth like a lake, sometimes turbulent like a set of angry waves.

"Curve," "Slipping the Glimpse," "Varykino Snow," "Scalp Salad," "Krill Slippin'," "The Drowning Man Knows His God" — these and other Mermen instrumental songs are buttery barrels, sonic swells cascading into turbulent whitewater.

Surfing, and water in general, have always been a big part of Thomas' life. He is the extraordinary guitarist — praised by *Guitar Player* and *Rolling Stone* magazines — and composer for the Mermen, a San Francisco trio heavily influenced by classic surf music (Dick Dale, the Ventures) and the psychedelic rock of Jimi Hendrix; the name of the band comes from the Hendrix jam "1983 (A Merman I Should Turn to Be)."

The Mermen will probably play an homage to that song (but not the whole 20-minute thing) when they paddle into the **Crocodile** on Saturday (10 p.m., \$10).

For someone as heavily into Hendrix as Thomas is ("I love the imagery in his music — most of it's water"), he rarely plays Seattle — hasn't been here for five or six years, he reckons. Then again, and this should be no surprise, seeing as he likes surfing almost as much as he likes playing the guitar, he's a bit of a slacker. "I had a long spot there where I didn't tour at all, didn't really do anything," he muses, before going off to a Sunday-night jam at a beach joint called the Sand Bar. "I bought a lot of recording equipment, just messed around with recording."

Thomas finally ended his hibernation by releasing the album "The Amazing California Health and Happiness Show" in 2000, and he and his fellow Mermen — bass guitarist Jennifer Burnes and drummer Martyn Jones — have toured often since.

Fascinating guy, this Jim Thomas. He says that the 1996 EP "Songs of the Cow" — likely the definitive Mermen release — was affected most not by Dale, not by Hendrix, but by "Dr. Zhivago."

He says the Seattle concert will be "pretty typical Mermen ... a guitar-ridden show, with lots of feedback."

For more on the Mermen: [www.mermen.net](http://www.mermen.net). For more on that giant wave: [www.maysurfer.com](http://www.maysurfer.com) or [www.surfpulse.com](http://www.surfpulse.com). (Awesome photos.)

### More shows

- What would you get if you crossed Bob Dylan and Warren Zevon? Something like **Dan Bern**.

The delightfully quirky, musically gifted Bern sings about asking God if he can go back in time and try to talk Kurt Cobain out of suicide. But God says "no," figuring Dan would just bug Kurt about trying to get industry connections.

The ~~song is~~ "God Said No," and it's fairly typical Bern, here goofy, there profound ("God said Time/Time belongs to me/Time's my secret weapon/My final advantage").

The **curious Bern** wisecracks and cracks wise at **I-Spy** on Wednesday (9 p.m., \$12).

- The musical collective called **Pigface** is celebrating its 10th anniversary with a tour that brings it to **Experience Music Project** on Monday (8 p.m., \$15, all ages). Founder **Martin Atkins**, the drummer from Public Image Ltd., will be joined by singers **Meg Lee Chin**, **Chris Connelly**, bass player **Charles Levi** and perhaps a local star or two.