



US Report

Supported by **THE MERMEN** the return Of **THE VENTURES**

by Ray Forth

Thirty years of "Hawaii 50". That was the theme for the San Francisco show presented by Lift Off Spacecapades and Tiki News magazine. Hawaii 3-0 was just one of two appearances by The Ventures, March 26th and 27th, the first show taking place down in Santa Cruz.

Nolde was with them, while Gerry sat out the two shows. What a treat. This wasn't part of a tour either, just these two performances. And though the sets, both nights were identical, the difference in venues made them each interesting in their own way.

In Santa Cruz, The Ventures played at Palookaville, a small former movie house with a smaller capacity creating a more intimate environment for the full house of rabid fans.

The San Francisco show, was at Maritime Hall, a cavernous ballroom setting with a very high ceiling and a large, steeply tiered balcony in the rear. A capacity crowd lent this show the feel of a big-scale event.

The opening act in Santa Cruz was The Ziggens, a modern, alternative rock vocal band, with a sense of humour. But even playing a couple of instrumentals didn't alter the sense of being out of place as a Ventures' opener, in terms of theme or mood. There were so many more possibilities, and I had been campaigning for Splashback, who are home-based in the Santa Cruz area. But to be fair, we were in the minority as The Ziggens were popular with the mostly local audience who had seen them previously.

No problem in San Francisco with The Mermen, or should I say the 'new' Mermen. It's totally Jim Thomas's baby now, with a new rhythm section, and the addition of a second

guitar, which created a rich fullness to the music.

Playing through the superb sound system of the Maritime, the effect was entralling. Add to that, the Light Show's liquid projections on three sides (by Brotherhood Of Lights, who used to do the Airplane / Dead shows), and it was - dare I say it - a mind-enhancing combo of light and sound.

Normally eschewing covers, The Mermen nevertheless opened with a jaunty, flowing version of "Latinia". "Le Jizz Hot" was a pun title referring to the jazz chordings of the next number. "Sponge Cooke", off the new record, features Jim's double-neck guitar and shows the influence of "Journey To The Stars".

One song merged into the next, "Burn" (which did), was also a new tune. "Splashin' With The Mermaid", you may recall from "Krill Slippin'", my favourite Mermen recording and the most traditional sounding (and accessible) of Mermen music. Jim Thomas however, considers it primitive compared to where he is now. I suggested he re-record some, if not all that CD. There's a lot of good material there.

"Lonely Playboy" was written by drummer Vince's father who used to be in The Playboys, who once opened for The Ventures! What goes around ... "Astroboy" had a "Penetration" flavour" and was written by Shigemitsu Komiyama of Shig & Buzz, who was in the audience and saluted by Jim. Shig also previously arranged and sponsored a Japanese tour of The Mermen.

Here's a title for you - "Emmy Lou & Clarence Ride West & Then South - Way South". For Emmylou Harris and Clarence White (Byrds etc.) are some of Jim's all-time favourite guitarists. More interesting musical pieces

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included "The Curve", "Merry Go Round", "Sway", "Here", "Kitty Kitty" and "Unto The Resplendent", with a marching beat, the feel of an Irish jig and a haunting "Lonely Surfer" influence.

A terrific set, and kudos to Vince Littleton (drums), Randy Clark (guitar) and Mike Silverman (bass). All highly professional who, between them have played (or are playing) with Daryl Anger, Merl Saunders, Fabulous Hedgehogs and a host of others. They had only two rehearsals (where else have we heard that lately?), but you wouldn't have guessed it by the high calibre of precision.

They played cohesively and very fluidly. Jim has been doing The Mermen for eleven years now and still is not content. He continues to push the envelope and he's been doing other projects, such as the Road Rash video game along with Sugar Ray. The new CD will most likely be called "The Amazing California Health & Happiness Show".

In the audience for THE VENTURES in San Francisco, were members of The Phantom Surfers, Splashback, Trashwomen, Swamis, Pollo Del Mar, Jumbo Shrimp as well countless others I'm sure I missed. In Santa Cruz, I met Martin and Vicki Neff, old friends of Nokle Edwards, who had driven down from Eugene, Oregon - a long drive. He plays guitar and she produces the odd show up there including The Ventures. Very nice couple with whom I chatted on and off throughout the course of both shows.

Martin and I were talking at Palookaville, when a young guy carrying a guitar case politely approached us wanting to know if he could have The Ventures sign his guitar. We said sure and he proceeded to uncase a 1964 Mosrite Ventures Model II. I asked if he was in a band and he said yes, and had rushed over from a rehearsal, having heard about the show only an hour before.

He said his playing was very influenced by The Ventures and when I asked the band's name, he replied Smashmouth. When Vicki heard that, it was "Oh, my God! My son loves you guys." Turns out Smashmouth is on MTV doing big concerts, has a new CD and are very popular with the younger crowd. So Gregory

Camp, who came to have his guitar signed, autographed a guitar pick for Vicki's son.

When the familiar drum roll and chords of "Walk, Don't Run" began, I started writing WDR, Per, Lull, and Blue..... I had to cross it out. What they opened with, Bob on lead guitar, was a medley of "WDR", "Rawhide", "Shanghaied", "Torquay", "Work Song", "Mr. Moto", "Comin' Home", "Besame Mucho", "El Cumbanchero", "Bumble Bee", "Perfidia" and "Blue Moon" with a 'WDR' reprise in San Francisco. Wow! It was great and I hadn't heard a few of these for some time.

Bob continued on lead with "Peter Gunn" which sounded quite effective, even without the missing Gerry McGee; "Hurricane" (particularly strong) and "Bombora". Bob's leads were really sizzling.

Nokle took over on lead and off we went with "Cruel Sea", "Telstar", "Driving Guitars", "Bulldog" and "Apache". It was like he'd never left. He's hasn't lost a thing and maybe sounds better than ever. Bob introduced Nokle and his Pulp Fiction number, "Surf Rider" (The Lively Ones' version is on the movie but you knew that) which was taken at a brisk tempo.

With Gerry absent, Don did two vocals - "Do You Wanna Dance" and "Runaway". Someone has already said it, and I agree, the two best rhythm guitarists maybe ever, are Keith Richards and Don Wilson. Don's strumming at both shows, was like a locomotive chugging the band along. A food counter person at Palookaville told me he knew of The Ventures and particularly Nokle who had recorded five CDs in the Philippines where this fellow was from. Judy Edwards told me those recordings are hung up with the Japanese recording company - another headache for Nokle.

Next up "Showdown At Newport" ("Black Sand Beach"), "Tequila", with a bouncing lead, "La Bamba", with vocal 'Bambas' and a powerful "House Of The Rising Sun". Nokle was particularly good on this one. Actually, Nokle was wailing on everything.

"Penetration" and "Out Of Limits" followed and then "Walk, Don't Run '64" with Don's crunching guitar chords was hot and the audience loved it. Nokle continued with "Yellow Jacket" and "Secret Agent Man" (again