

AFTER THE GOLD RUSH

SAN FRANCISCO'S NEW MUSICAL GENERATION



FROM THE WARM DAYS to the cool nights, the Mission-style burrito to the radical politics, the stepped architecture to the original Amoeba Music, Pac Bell Park to Golden Gate Park, The Greek Theater to The Fillmore, there's a lot to love about San Francisco. As a wholly unique American city, San Francisco provides artists, thinkers and activists an opportunity to thrive in a place where cultures and points of view collide, where lines blur and where, even just for a second, you can glimpse a better future.

So it's no surprise that some 41 years after the Summer of Love, San Francisco is abuzz with sounds that challenge the mind and ear, as much as they nod to the locally bred rock gods of yore.

If in the 1960s and '70s, San Francisco changed the face of music and the culture itself, with everyone from Jerry Garcia and Janis Joplin to Bill Graham and Jann Wenner opening minds to the possibilities of just how big this rock and roll thing could get, the city's music and culture continued to morph and expand in the '80s. It was then that we got our first glimpses of thrash-metal pioneers Metallica, ska-punk originals Operation Ivy, the new punk of Green Day, the rap-metal of Faith No More, the acoustic dreamscapes of Mark Kozelek and the political hip-hop of Michael Franti.

The music in San Francisco continues to evolve, while remaining incredibly diverse: Kozelek, the onetime leader of The Red House Painters, is evolving into one of the pre-eminent singer/songwriters of our time, his Sun Kil Moon records redefining folk for a new era and audience. Since Michael Franti began drawing accolades for his political filmmaking, and began delving into reggae and guitar-based songwriting, Lyrics Born has emerged as perhaps the city's top MC, alongside acts like Blackalicious and beat-boxer Kid Beyond. The Mother Hips, meanwhile, may not just be one of the city's best bands, but also the heroes of San Francisco's new generation of bands and singer/songwriters.

Here we introduce you to a few of those artists whose philosophies, if not their styles, recall those of their local predecessors. We shine a light on artists who, in the true spirit of this Californian cultural oasis, are melding styles and cultures—artists like Rupa and The April Fishes and The Dodos. We take a closer look at gifted songwriters like Jackie Greene and Brett Dennen and tip our hats to a new breed of psychedelic rock in profiles on Wooden Shjips and Howlin Rain, who've grabbed a smoldering torch from the likes of Moby Grape and Jefferson Airplane and created something that feels both fresh and exciting. And we check in with two of the jamband scene's brightest prospects: Tea Leaf Green and New Monsoon.

We see gold in this new breed of adventurous, driven and open-minded San Francisco musicians, and we think you will you, too.

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Tea Leaf Green

The New Guard

"I was cleaning up vomit on the carousel at the San Francisco Zoo and thought, you know, it can't be *that* bad." And so he did it. Josh Clark quit his job to become the full-time guitarist for Tea Leaf Green. Having moved from L.A. to S.F. in the late '90s, Clark had assembled a band with bassist Ben Chambers and drummer Scott Rager. But it was the addition of singer/songwriter/keyboardist and harmonica player Trevor Garrod that gave the group life.

Heading just 50 miles north, Garrod left

piece of that."

For the first few years, and even into the first couple albums (1999's self-titled debut and 2001's *Midnight on the Reservoir*), the focus was on Clark's explosive guitar-led jams. But as the sound tightened, Garrod gained enough confidence in his bandmates to unlock his catalog of songs and assert his vision, not to mention his soul-baked vocals. "I was a bit of a snob at first and didn't want these guys to mess up my songs," he laughs.

It's this yin-yang dynamic of Garrod's tender, folk-rock songwriting and Clark's blistering guitar that defines TLG. "He's [Garrod] very opposite from me, so I think it creates an interesting push and pull," says Clark.



the family farm with flowers in his hair and dreams of forming a rock band in his head. He stumbled upon the trio at a warehouse party in S.F. and was drawn like a magnet to Clark. "I saw Josh wailing on his guitar and it made me so happy," recalls Garrod. "I hadn't seen anybody just unpretentiously shredding on guitar for a while, and I'm like, 'I want to get a

"Josh is all about AC/DC. I think that's the only record that he actually owns," cracks Garrod. But it's more than just style, their whole approach is different. "He's like a fucking idiot savant," continues Garrod. "I have to work and practice every day or else my chops go to shit."

It was on 2005's *Taught to Be Proud*, the band's fourth studio effort, that TLG real-

ly hit its stride. Technically sharp from years of fierce live shows and mature enough to truly craft its compositions, the band won a Jammy for song of the year with the album's title track.

Releasing the stellar live album *Rock 'N' Roll Band* the following year, the band rose from bars to clubs to headlining The Fillmore and supporting artists like Trey Anastasio and Dave Matthews. Then in November 2007, bassist Ben Chambers announced he was leaving the band.

At the time it appeared to be a major blow. But when that door shut, another flew open for Reed Mathis. As bass player for the wildly experimental Jacob Fred Jazz Odyssey, Mathis didn't seem the obvious choice. While Garrod and Clark confirm that

Mathis is "the best bass player" they know, neither really thought he'd accept the offer. "You feel like some kind of ugly dude that gets a hot chick," laughs Garrod.

Shocked as his new partners might be, Mathis says he never even hesitated. "I got to sit in with them at High Sierra last year and the music really turned me on. We spoke the same dialect right off the bat, like I'd grown up with them. And the call came so out of the blue that I just had to follow the rabbit down the hole."

"I think he's just kind of woken the band up," says Clark. "Over the years you get into the same sort of streams and channels that you've dug out of the songs. And he brings whole new waterways."

Riding high with Mathis, the new TLG decided to make a record. Working with a producer for the first time, they spent early January in Virginia with David Lowery (Cracker/Camper

Van Beethoven) creating what they feel is their finest work to date. With the yet-to-be-named album scheduled for a fall release, a gifted new bass player and constant touring, Clark is all smiles: "It's a great time to be Tea Leaf Green." ★

Aaron Kayce

LOCAL RECOMMENDATION: Eric McFadden, Sean Hayes



New Monsoon The Inheritors

Smoothly mercurial, New Monsoon harnesses nosebleed-level musicianship to a sound that's seductive but hard to place. Drawing from road blues, electric jazz, cerebral folk, one-drop reggae, classic Fillmore rock and further out to Indian and Latin traditions, its music snuggles up fast but purrs in a wholly unique way. "We were all drawn to this place from various parts because of our different musical interests," says singer/guitarist/banjoist Bo Carper. "Hopefully our music reflects a modern interpretation of the best parts of Santana, The Grateful Dead and Shakti, and a general Bay Area openness, a place that's always been a melting pot of all kinds of world music."

New Monsoon was formed around Carper's acoustic, finger-style picking and the sharp, driving electricity of guitarist singer Jeff Miller when the pair met while attending Penn State in the late '90s. That interplay of warm acoustic tones and charged electric bite—born from a shared love of *Led Zeppelin III*—has remained at the heart of its sound through various line-up changes including a heralded seven-piece juggernaut with tabla and Latin percussion. Now a streamlined quintet with Phil Ferlino (keyboards, vocals), Marshall Harrell (bass) and Sean Hutchinson (drums), New Monsoon is built on the pillars of the '60s SF scene—a healthy dose of improvisation, a psychedelic character and a broad stylistic reach—without expressly emulating anyone. "It's music that tickles your synapses in a way that makes them dance a little," offers Carper.

It's a polyglot mixture that's become more distinctive over the years, particularly on its 2007 album, *V*, which was produced by Grateful Dead veteran John Cutler. It's a welcoming sound that often hides a weightier philosophical undertow. "You can feel when something sounds good and people will dig it," says Miller. "We want to invite people into our house with a smile. Once we get you in there, down the road, we'll play something darker. We're not above freaking people out," he says laughing.

Today, New Monsoon has pared away any sonic fat, digging in harder to its songwriting and increasingly layered three-part harmonies more than ever and finding a unified vision for its diverse musical interests. Driven by a young, nimble rhythm team, New Monsoon is a worthy descendent of Bay Area gems like Sons of Champlin and Legion of Mary, where palpable drive is anchored to great skill in a way that leaves the possibilities wide open anytime they play. ★

Dennis Cook

LOCAL RECOMMENDATION: The Mother Hips