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Summing Up Surf

The Expendables nail the essence of the Santa Cruz surf-punk sound

By David Espinoza

MY FIRST IMPRESSION after purchasing **Sublime's** classic debut album, *40 Oz to Freedom*, back in my senior year of high school was, "What is this crap?" To be honest, it took a couple of weeks to grow on me before it earned a space on the shelf reserved for sacred albums such as Joni Mitchell's *Blue*, Paul Simon's *Graceland* and Paula Abdul's *Forever Your Girl*. Local surf-ska-dub-ragamuffin punk crew the **Expendables'** full-length *No Time to Worry* doesn't suffer from any such initial skepticism--it rocks from the get-go. A 19-track feast for the easy-living, partylike atmosphere (clearly inspired by the defunct Sublime), the Expendables represent Santa Cruz's surf punk culture to a T.

There are basically two sounds that sum up SC's surf scene: hard-core thrash/punk and uppity ska-reggae-punk stuff. The former bands are about as common as ground squirrels up at UCSC, and finding decent bands of the latter variety is an exercise in futility. The Expendables stand out, though, as a bunch of guys who've got the energy and drive to keep crowds rockin' anytime, anywhere, for any reason. As honest as a Pacific Avenue panhandler asking for beer

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money, the Expendables sing about subjects familiar to most folks living the saltwater life: surfing, drinking, toking, cops, and chicks on the side. Track 16, "Strive," shows the dudes' sensitive side, and also has one of the catchiest melodies. Of course, like Sublime, the Expendables can only hold down the mellow tunes for so long before patience gives way and they break into something more fierce.

Size Matters

Just when it seemed 7-inch records were the epitome of hip indie-rockerness, the locals are now putting out tapes made from four tracks--damnit! And I'd just sold my Walkman. If we shut our eyes and pretend **Sin in Space's** "Hellfire" never happened, then **Jeffrey Manson** (also bassist for **Hate Mail Express**) deserves the gold for best single of the year, "Draw Me a Design." A Beckish semifolk frolic, made with samplers, drum machines, bass, acoustic guitar and other toys, "Draw Me a Design" is an incredibly smart song worthy of the attention of college radio stations across the nation. Manson, a young 'un in his early 20s, is already a skilled pop songwriter capable of layering together low-fi pop collages of beautiful fuzzy noise with vocals reminiscent of Steve Malkmus and Beck. If you flip the tape over (a task many teens weaned on DVD and CDs will not be familiar with) the **Barometers** (yet another project of Aleks Prechtl, Manson and Rick Swan) will treat your ears to crazed low-fi cow-punk, complete with banjos. The intentionally shabby quality of recording makes the singers sound as if they have kazoos stuck in their throats, and the drowsy guitars give the two tracks almost a Southern Goth vibe, only stranger. As Manson and Swan croon, "We've been delirious for days."

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From the September 5-12, 2001 issue of Metro Santa Cruz.

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