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Pacific DownTime: On a rare break from touring, Santa Cruz's own Expendables get ready for two nights at the Catalyst.

Eastside Export

With a new album and a packed touring schedule, Santa Cruz's Expendables are riding high.

By **Garrett Wheeler**

Given the raucous nature of their music, the Expendables seem remarkably tidy in person. Granted, none of the four band members actually still lives in the spacious Pleasure Point home we've chosen for the interview on this bright Santa Cruz afternoon, but still, there's no mistaking the level of--dare I say?--maturity that pervades our conversation. The guys are relaxed, sober and articulate. There are no booze bottles scattered about, no overflowing ashtrays, just a few surfboards. Adjacent to the living room is the band's practice room, a cavelike lair stuffed with gear: amplifiers, a drum set, microphones and a tangle of black cords amassed on the floor. The tiny room serves as the band's headquarters when they're in town--something that's becoming increasingly infrequent for the Expendables. With a vigorous tour schedule that has them on the road at least 150 days a year, not counting time in the studio, it's a rare break for the band to get a few weeks of downtime.

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"It's been rad being home," says bassist Ryan Demars. "We've been practicing every day, going to the beach, seeing friends and family. We really enjoy our time off."

Lead singer Geoff Weers points to another benefit of the rock band hiatus: "We finally get some time to sit down and rest," Weers says. "Touring nonstop pretty much destroys your body and your mind, but it's worth it."

Anyone who's ever been to an Expendables show knows what Weers is getting at. To say that the band goes all out is a severe understatement. By the end of every performance, the band appears physically deflated--drenched in sweat, hoarse and half-drunk. But that's the Expendables: balls to the wall, no exceptions.

I ask the guys about playing live and what it means to them. "[Live shows] are what we do best," guitarist Raul Bianchi says. "It's what we know. We're more comfortable onstage than in the studio, for sure. But I guess that's what you get when you play 150 shows a year and only go into the studio a couple times."

Indeed, the Expendables seem to be at their best onstage, in front of a live audience, with plenty of beer to go around. I was lucky enough to experience the Expendables' ferocity firsthand a few years back when they played a house party in my garage, but that's another story.

Despite the band's preference for rocking a crowd over recording, their latest album indicates that the Expendables are no longer strangers to the interiors of the studio as well. The self-titled LP, released last September, is a 16-song collection of the sun-bleached brand of rock & roll the Expendables have come to perfect. It's also their most polished.

"You know, you're never totally satisfied with an album, but I think it's our best," Bianchi says. "It's definitely our most diverse." Styles ranging from reggae to punk rock to classic metal display the Expendables' wide palette of influences without compromising the feel-good attitude fans have come to expect. Songs like "Let Loose" and "Down Down Down" adhere to the laid-back California credo, while the album's metal throwback, "War Cry," is a three-minute romp through the heavy-metal heyday of the '80s.

Now that the Expendables have a few weeks to recuperate from their seemingly endless time on the road, they have time to think

about upcoming projects, which they say could include a live album or an acoustic release. For now, though, the band seems content kicking back on the Eastside and gearing for upcoming back-to-back shows at the Catalyst.

"We've sold out the Catalyst, like, 20 times or something," says Demars, "but this is the first time we've done two nights in a row. It should be a good chance for everyone to come out."

Rest up, kids, it's going to be a wild weekend--Expendables style.

THE EXPENDABLES play Friday, May 9, and Saturday, May 10, at 7:30pm at the Catalyst, 1011 Pacific Ave., Santa Cruz. Opening bands include Guttermouth, the Skaflaws, the Lonely Kings and OPM. Tickets are \$16 advance/\$20 door and can be purchased online, at the Catalyst or Streetlight Records.