

Expendables aim for music that's not disposable

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The Santa Cruz-based Expendables started out playing house parties up and down California. In an interview, band guitarist/singer Geoff Weers cites San Diego's Slightly Stoopid as an important influence. The Expendables signed with Slightly Stoopid's label, Stoopid Records, and hooked up with Silverback Management, which handles Slightly Stoopid. (Courtesy photo)

Geoff Weers couldn't resist joking when asked what he hopes his band, the Expendables, will be able to accomplish with its new CD. "I hope we sell a billion records," the guitarist/singer said in a recent phone interview.

For a group that in a literal sense began as a party band and considers creating a fun atmosphere at its live shows to be one of its priorities, that sort of response makes sense. But in all seriousness, Geoff

has some realistic goals for the new album, "Prove It," which was released May 11, and what it will do for his band.

"I hope this album gives us a little bit more respect from you guys, the critics," he said. "We kind of get hounded on for being just another ska, weed-toking, reggae-punk band. But I feel like we have a little bit more substance than that, and I hope this album kind of proves it.

"This is the album where we want to prove we aren't just recycling our sound," he said. "We're improving and we are growing as a band, and we

are constantly trying to make our sound better."

"Prove It" is the fifth album from the band, which formed in 1997 in Santa Cruz. Like a pair of other ska-influenced groups that have recently begun making waves, Slightly Stoopid and Pepper, the Expendables' career has been a decidedly do-it-yourself undertaking.

"From the beginning, we've always been a party band," Weers said. "That's kind of how we started doing stuff back in the day. We'd tour ---- well, not really tour, but we'd take weekends and play college towns that were near Santa Cruz. We'd go and play Santa Barbara, San Diego, San Luis Obispo, Chico, and it was pretty much backyard parties. That was pretty much how we developed our live show."

Even if the group in its early years was strictly a weekend endeavor, Weer and his bandmates ---- guitarist Raul Bianchi, drummer Adam Patterson and bassist Ryan DeMars ---- showed that they weren't simply aiming to be a bar band by getting into songwriting and album-making early on. The group's first CD, "No Time to Worry," came out in 2000 and was followed up just a year later by the CD, "Open Container."

By 2004, the group was starting to show some small but real signs of progress. That year saw the release of the CD, "Gettin' Filthy," which included several songs that have been staples of the band's live set. The group also landed its first legitimate tour, opening for reggae artist Eek-a-Mouse on a tour of the Western states.

It was around this time that the Expendables made another connection that played a key role in the group's career. The group began opening the occasional show for San Diego's Slightly Stoopid, which after seeing the Expendables a few times, took the band out on tour.

Slightly Stoopid eventually signed the Expendables to its record label, Stoopid Records, and the Expendables also signed on with Silverback Management, which handles Slightly Stoopid.

"They've definitely been a huge influence and mentors, almost like big brothers to us," Weer said of Slightly Stoopid. "Ever since almost Day One, they've given us shows or we've played shows with them in our town or around California. Then it turned into playing tours with them and being on their label and getting in touch with their management. They definitely opened the door for us in many ways."

In fact, the Slightly Stoopid connection goes beyond the business and

touring side of the music business. Weer said he can credit that group with inspiring the Expendables' blend of ska and heavy metal.

"Actually for me personally, I think the real eye-opener and mix of the music was (from) Slightly Stoopid's 'Longest Barrel Ride' album," Weer said.

The "Prove It" CD has taken the Expendables to a new level of professionalism. It's the first time the group used a producer on an album. A first recording session was done with Paul Leary, a former member of the Butthole Surfers who has also produced Sublime and Slightly Stoopid. A second recording session was produced by El Hefe, guitarist with NOFX. "Paul Leary ended up being a great, great producer," Weer said. "Before this we never really knew the role of a producer too much. ... Paul Leary really opened my eyes to how a producer is really sort of another, he's a third ear, but he also becomes part of the band for a while. He just really got inside the music and really kind of knew our direction."

The band was also excited to work with El Hefe because NOFX is a band that the members of the Expendables had long admired.

"He's got a great ear," Weer said of El Hefe. "I don't know if people know this, but he's a really good vocalist. So he really had some good influence on singing harmonies."

Weer didn't get too boastful about the new CD, but he clearly expects the CD to represent a step up musically over the group's previous albums.

"We didn't want an album with any filler. Our big goal was to make an album where each song stands alone individually, where each song can be a single to somebody's ears.

"As songwriters, I think this ... album is going to be good because of our growth as songwriters," Weer said. "We're not writing two-chord reggae songs. We're not sticking to the same rut that we were last album. I think we've definitely grown since our last album."

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