



The beat goes on

Looking back at pop music in Santa Cruz

By Jayme Kelly Curtis

James Durbin made the final four on "American Idol," scored a national indie label recording contract, and sang for a record 30,000 fans at the Boardwalk. Chris Rene performed his own compositions for a third-place finish on "The X Factor" and signed with Epic Records. The Civil Wars, a folk duo featuring local singer Joy Williams and Nashville's John Paul White, won two Grammy awards for their "Barton Hollow" album. Singer/songwriter Tess Dunn, who has performed on the Vans Warped Tour for three years, just released her second album and is well on her way to stardom after being named one of the "Top 11 Bay Area Artists of 2011" by radio station 99.7 FM. Guitarist/singer Jackie Partida's rock/pop/metal/punk band Jackie Rocks continues to represent Daisy Rock guitars, made the OurStage top 40 chart, and won the 2011 Rock Battle of the Bay for under-21 bands.

The success of these young performers is no accident. Santa Cruz has long been a breeding ground for musicians, many of whom come from notable music families. Durbin, for example, is the son of the late Willie Durbin, a local legend who played bass with a number of bands before he died in 1998. Musician and memorabilia collector Rick McKee, better known as Ukulele Dick, remembers Willie fondly.

"I have in my collection an LP from 1980 by the band Fantasy on Buzz Records with Willie on fretless bass," McKee said. "Willie was a dear friend — a haunted and brilliant musician. James's success would have made Willie very proud."

A well-known guitar repairman, McKee has observed and documented Santa Cruz music history since 1972, when he started at the Guitar Works (he now owns the business). His customers span decades of local music history and have contributed samples of their work for his Santa Cruz Music Archives.

"I've been collecting for nearly four decades," McKee said. His archives encompass several ceiling-high stacks of boxes that contain LPs, 45s, cassette and reel-to-reel tapes, CDs, posters, T-shirts, programs, guitar picks, videos, and related ephemera. His collection goes back to the 1880s. Local historian Ross Eric Gibson also has assembled a collection of hundreds of compositions spanning more than 150 years.



Photo: Arthur Rosato

Santa Cruz's Snail was continually evolving, this early version features (L-R) Bruce Hubbard, Victor Phillips, Larry Hosford, Bob O'Neill and Ken Kraft.

Gibson said that the first known surf song composed on the mainland was "Surfing in the Santa Cruz Way," written in 1948. The original music has been lost, but the lyrics survive as a testament to our local pop music pedigree.



Photo: Norman Seeff

Lacy J. Dalton, chosen Best New Female Country Vocalist in 1979 and referred to as "Country's Bonnie Raitt" by People Magazine, spent her early years in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Santa Cruz has been home to rock and pop stars of every persuasion, McKee said. Some of them were in the background, like Boulder Creek Realtor Jim Lee, who wrote and produced the hit song "Let's Dance" for Chris Montez in 1962. It shot up to No. 4 in the United States and to No. 2 in Britain, and was etched into infamy in John Belushi's 1973 cult movie hit, "Animal House." Others are intergalactic luminaries, like Neil Young and Carlos Santana, who have lived and played in Santa Cruz.

Homegrown Rock

The homegrown bands that emerged on the Central Coast in the 60s reflected the diversity of local cultures. Louie and the Lovers were a Central Coast band that fused the San Francisco sound with country rock and Tejano. The group featured lead singer Louie Ortega, who later performed with the Texas Tornados. The Lovers recorded only one album, but it became a collectors' item and

was re-issued in 2003 with new tracks featuring sax legend David "Fathead" Newman and Rock and Roll Hall of Famer Dr. John.

The Tikis were a local surf/English beat band that at one point included singer/songwriter Randy Newman. They morphed into Harpers Bizarre in 1967 and launched Simon and Garfunkle's "59th Street Bridge Song (Feelin' Groovy)" to the No. 13 spot on the Billboard Top 100 chart. Their debut album featured Ted Templeman, Dick Scoppettone, Eddie James, Dick Yount, and John Petersen. Peterson had previously played with the Beau Brummels.

In the early 1960s, Coryn and the Corvettes were the hottest teen sensations in town. They played everywhere, from school dances to the Civic Auditorium the Coconut Grove. Their sound was driven by the wailing sax of Cornelius "Corny" Bumpus, who was still

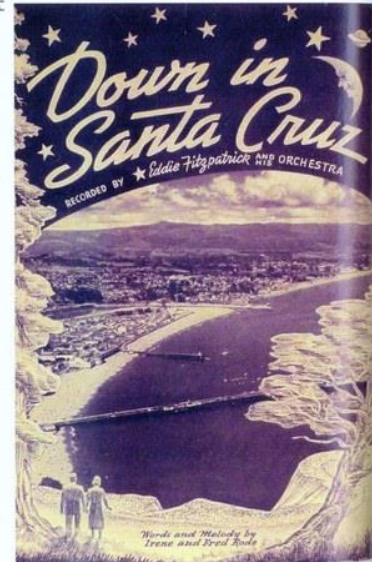
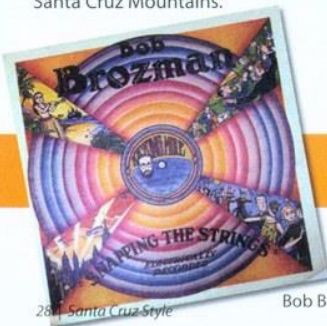


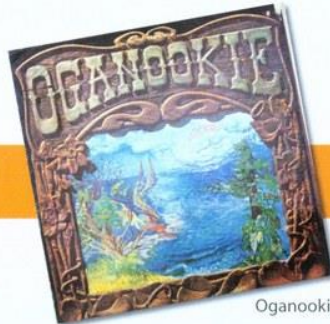
Photo: MCA Records

The original sheet music for *Down in Santa Cruz* by Irene & Fred Rode published in 1948.



281 Santa Cruz Style

Bob Brozman



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The Call

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The Call

a student at Santa Cruz High School at the time. Bumpus went on to achieve national recognition with Bobby Freeman, Moby Grape, the Doobie Brothers, Steely Dan, Etta James, Robben Ford, and even Felton-girl-turned-country-star Lacy J. Dalton.

Moby Grape has a strong branch on the Santa Cruz rock musician family tree. Jerry Miller, whom Eric Clapton once called the "best guitar player in the world," was a founding member of the psychedelic-era band that formed in 1966 and was already famous by the Summer of Love in 1967. For years, Miller and other band members lived here in Santa Cruz, at 20 Granite Creek Road. Their address became the title of the band's fifth album. Moby Grape often shared the bill at the Fillmore, the Avalon, and the Carousel with Snail, a Santa Cruz favorite started in 1967 by Soquel High School students Bob O'Neill, Ron Fillmore, and Dave Kibler.

Snail was a phenomenon in its own right. O'Neill had started out in a band called the Cobras and then went to Talon Wedge before forming Snail. Many different musicians played with the band at one time or another. Among them was Larry Hosford, who later performed with Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, Jerry Jeff Walker, and Leon Russell, to name a few. Snail was hugely popular, selling out Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium and playing for thousands on the beach in Capitola. They toured with the Doobie Brothers and Styx.

The Doobie Brothers started out as a San Jose band, but they have always been associated with Santa Cruz as well. They played regularly at the Chateau Liberté, a rock club on Old Santa Cruz Highway in the mountains. Pat Simmons and Tiran Porter immortalized the Chateau in "Neal's Fandango," a song about returning to "the hills above Santa Cruz, where I spent my youth."



Photo: MCA Records

The Call, Michael Been, Tom Ferrier, Jim Goodwin and Scott Musick, recorded ten albums during their career that spanned two decades.

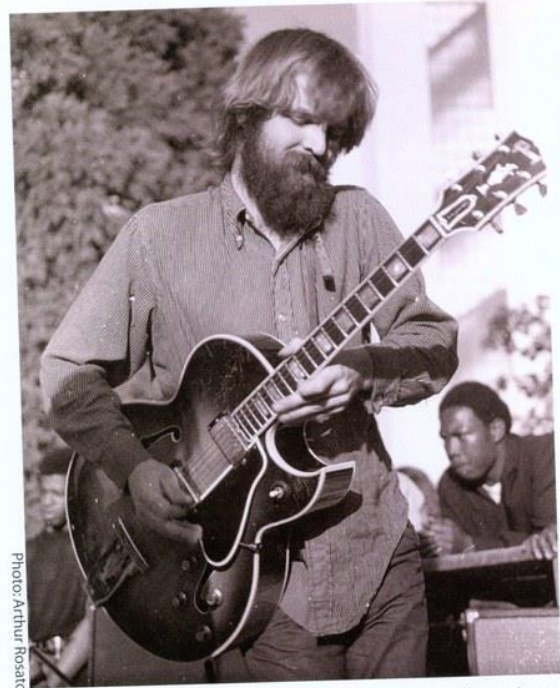


Photo: Arthur Rosato

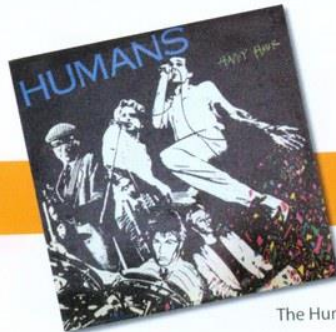
Jerry Miller, a founding member of Moby Grape, performs here with a local favorite The Rhythm Dukes.

One of the local musicians who eventually ended up playing with the Doobies was Dale Ockerman, a Pacific High School alum who played with Quicksilver Messenger Service and many other internationally known musicians before he joined the re-formed Doobie Brothers tour. Ockerman later founded "Musicscool," where he taught James Durbin. He also was one of the original members of the White Album Ensemble, a group McKee started. The Ensemble, which performs Beatle albums that were never performed live by the Fab Four, also includes Tiran Porter and Richard Bryant from the Doobie Brothers.

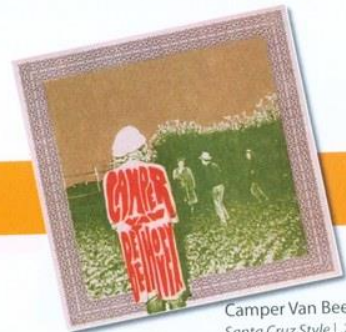
Ockerman, like so many Santa Cruz musicians, has pretty much played with everybody who, in turn, played with everybody else. He briefly played keyboards, for example, with Michael Been in a group called Airtight. Been had arrived on the scene in the 1970s and started a band called the Original Haze with



Lacy J. Dalton



The Humans



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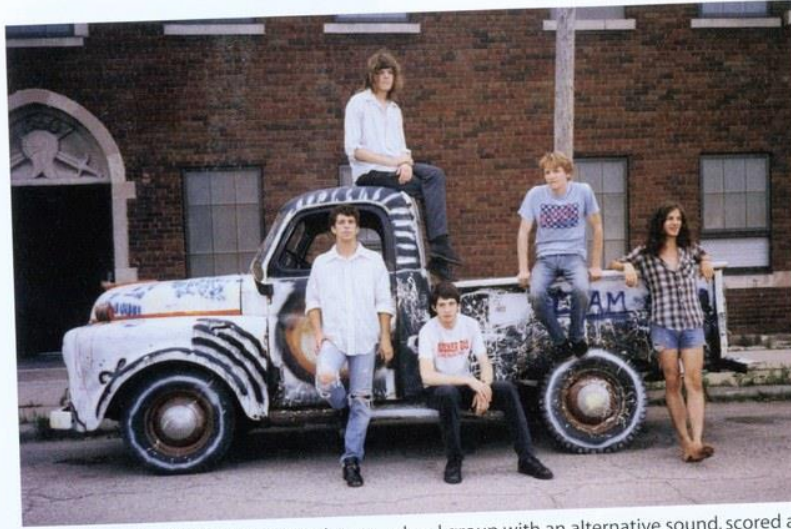


Photo: Camper van Beethoven collection

An early photo of Camper van Beethoven, a local group with an alternative sound, scored a No. 1 hit on Billboard's Modern Rock Tracks.



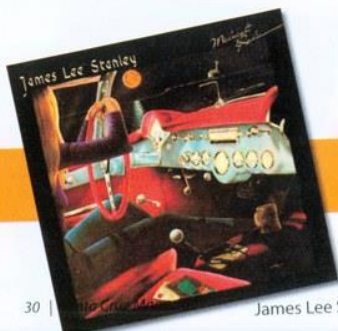
Formerly the Tikis, Harpers Bizarre achieved national recognition with their, 60s' hit Feelin' Groovy.

Jerry Miller and Corny Bumpus. That band broke up and Airtight was born. Airtight was extremely popular, packing local clubs to the rafters, but Been wanted to pursue a different sound. Enter The Call. Been joined forces with Scott Musick and former Artichoke Band guitarist Tom Ferrier and formed the alternative rock band that skyrocketed to international fame. When the Call released their first album, Peter Gabriel liked it so much he asked them to open for him on his 1982 "Shock the Monkey" tour. The Call became megastars, putting out 10 albums by 2000. Their songs often were in the Top 100 on the charts, including their No. 1 hit, "Let the Day Begin," in 1989.

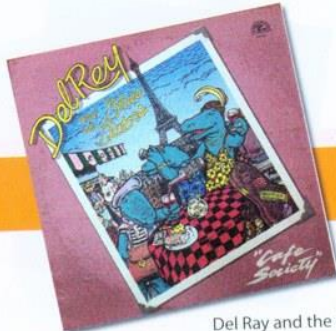
While The Call were touring the world with Gabriel, a couple of kids from Redlands — David Lowery and Chris Molla — were going to college in Santa Cruz and playing in a local band called Box O'Laffs. During their 1983 summer break, they and fellow student Victor Krummenacher went home and formed Camper van Beethoven with some musicians from garage bands down there. The band's eclectic blend of pop, ska, punk rock, and folk didn't go over well in the Inland Empire's hard-core punk scene, but it thrived in Santa Cruz. CVB became one of the biggest influences in indie rock. Their debut single, "Take the Skinheads Bowling," was later used in Michael Moore's award-winning 2002 film "Bowling for Columbine." Greg Lisher joined the group after the first album was released. When the group disbanded in 1990, Lowery formed Cracker and bassist David Immerglück joined Counting Crows. The group reunited in 1999 and released a new album of original material in 2004. McKee, who has been Lisher's guitar technician for more than two decades, said the group still maintains a solid presence here.

Photo: Warner Bros. Records

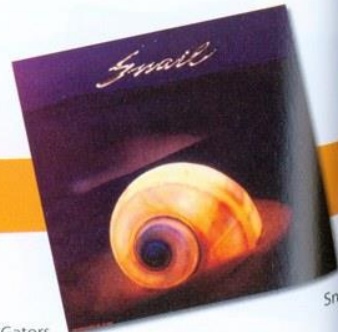
Record covers: Rick McKee collection



James Lee Stanley



Del Rey and the Blues Gators



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Photos: Warner Bros. Records
Record covers: Rick Mickel collection



Santa Cruz also has had a fair share of musicians who got their starts locally but made it big after they moved out of the area. Carmen Grillo is a perfect example. He gave lessons at the Guitar Works and fronted several local bands, including Feel Machine and White Eyes, before he moved to Los Angeles in the late 1970s to work with Bill Champlin, Rita Coolidge, and Donna Summer. In 1988 he joined Oakland's epic funk and soul group, Tower of Power.

Soul Queens

Gospel/R&B singer Tammi Brown, who grew up in Los Altos and moved to Santa Cruz eight years ago, is definitely a rising star. She sang on jazz guitarist Stanley Jordan's Grammy-nominated 2008 album "State of Nature," toured India with her former neighbor MC Hammer, and is recording an album for Motéma Music, a label that started in San Francisco but moved to New York in 2005. Despite the label's Big Apple location, Brown chose to record right here in Santa Cruz with

local players.

Aptos gospel singer Sista Monica Parker is a little bit Santa Cruz and a little bit soul. Last year she played here at home with BB King (at the Catalyst) before heading out for an international tour that took her to Paris, Bern, Monte Carlo and Greece. The "lioness of the blues," as she is affectionately known, is nominated year after year for industry awards, including a 2012 Blues Music Award nod for "Best Soul Blues Female Artist." Her original song "Show Me What You're Working With" helped Melanie Moore win the 2011 "So You Think You Can Dance" competition on Fox.

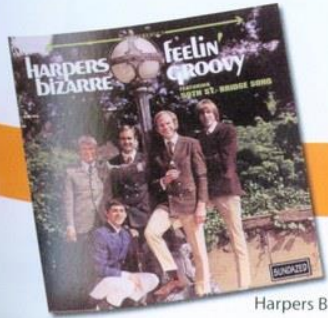
Singer/Songwriters

Jill Byrem was bored with the Greenwich Village folk scene when she moved to Santa Cruz in 1967 and started a psychedelic rock band called "Office." But after her husband/manager John Croston died in 1974, she went back to solo gigs, singing her own country/rock tunes in small clubs. A record producer

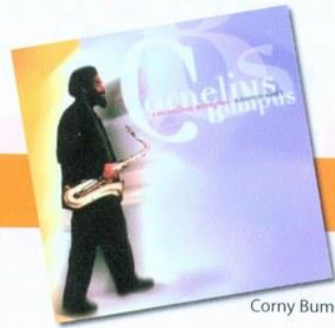
One Hand Clapping, featuring Moby Grape's Don Stevenson (drums) and Peter Lewis (guitar), performing at the UCSC Quarry in 1970.

saw her one night, offered her a recording contract, and told her to change her name. She became Lacy J. Dalton, moved to Nashville for awhile, and won the Country Music Association's Best New Female Vocalist award in 1979. One of the most popular country "outlaw" singers of the '80s, Dalton shared stages with Willie Nelson and Johnny Cash and became a country icon.

Dalton has said she is "knocked out" by Ginny Mitchell's country voice. Mitchell, a fourth-generation Santa Cruzan, moved to British Columbia for a few years and won the Canadian Country Music Association's Best New Vocalist award in 1986. She had five Top 40 hits up there before she moved back to Santa Cruz in 1991. She and filmmaker hus-



Harpers Bizarre



Corynne Bumpus



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band Marty Collins created the Digital Media Factory, a venue and production facility where they tape "Santa Cruz Live," a TV show featuring performances and interviews with musicians who are, "coming up, coming back, or passing through our town." Mitchell's "Girls From Santa Cruz" album is a live concert with Dalton and Mary McCaslin. A pioneer of open guitar tunings, McCaslin has been performing and recording since the 60s and has influenced many of today's "new folk" singer/songwriters.

Some of our best known singer/songwriters made their permanent homes here, while others just passed through. Bluegrass songstress Gillian Welch, for example, lived here while attending UCSC — she graduated with an art degree in 1990 — and moved on to win two Grammy nominations, including a win for her work on the "O Brother, Where Art Thou?" soundtrack. She sang with Alison Krauss and Emmylou Harris and served as associate producer on the album, which went platinum. Called "one of the most interesting singer-songwriters of her generation" by the Washington Post, Welch's songs have been recorded by some of the biggest stars in the business, including Jimmy Buffett, Trisha Yearwood, Joan Baez, and Miranda Lambert. Last summer she opened Neil Young's Buffalo Springfield reunion tour.

There are far too many notable local singer/songwriters to list here. Guitar-strumming, piano-plinking poets have been expressing themselves — and their political views — here for as far back as anyone can remember. One of our most notable singing social critics is Tom Lehrer, a classically trained pianist (and mathematician) whose darkly satirical songs attracted a significant cult following in the 1950s and '60s. Many of his songs, such as "Poisoning Pigeons In the Park" and "The Vatican Rag," got airplay on British radio stations, and Princess Margaret made him a star when she proclaimed him a favorite. He was hired as the resident songwriter for the U.S. version of the satirical television show, "That Was The Week That Was," but his lyrics were stridently censored by American network officials. Lehrer didn't move to Santa

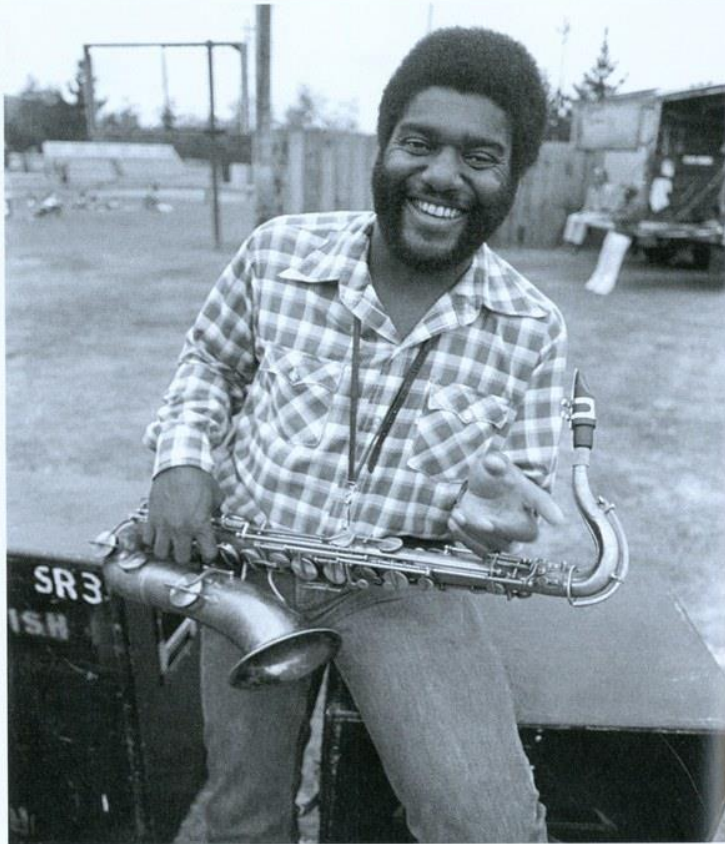
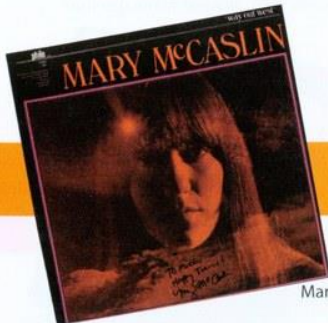


Photo Dan Coyro

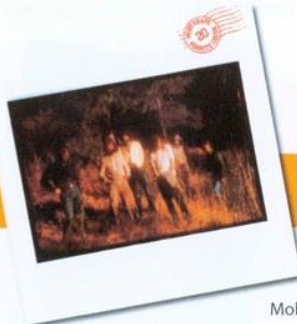
Although Coryn Bumpas performed with many local Santa Cruz bands as well as super groups, many longtime residents remember him most for his, 60's group "Coryn and the Corvettes".

Cruz until 1972, when he retired from the music circuit. He came to teach math at UCSC. The Brits didn't give up, however, and in 1980 a revival of his songs, "Tomfoolery" premiered on the London stage. Lehrer updated some of his lyrics and the revue was a major hit. He retired from teaching in 2001, but he still makes his home here in Santa Cruz.

Lehrer's musical style is, of course, several generations removed from the new breed of singer/songwriters coming out of Santa Cruz today, but it does represent a historical part of the tsunami of talent on the Central Coast. And no matter what happens to the rest of the planet, a musical *vibe* always will resonate from the home of the Mystery Spot. The beat, most definitely, goes on. ♣



Mary McCaslin



Moby Grape



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