

Eclectic Poison

Variety at Sam Bond's, Kaswell's fingerstyle blues at Luna.

It was back in January when I first told you about San Francisco's **The Slow Poisoners**. They're back, and performing with **The Hinges** and **The Ovulators** at Sam Bond's on Thursday, June 10. Bandleader and visionary Andrew Poisoner says, "About eight years ago, I was in Paris on my birthday and I had a vision of surrealistic rock and roll marrying the weirdest lyrics possible to roots-influenced music."

He's succeeded on both accounts, as his music celebrates the bizarre a bit like Jonathon Richman meets Marc Bolan. "I wanted a band flexible enough to play country music and psychedelic music and pop music and even R&B influenced music," he adds.

Originally, Poisoner enhanced the typical rock format (guitar, drums, bass) with that ultra-cool instrument, the theremin. That morphed into adding two cellos to the lineup, which, he says, "got really unwieldy and everything was feeding back on stage 'til it sounded like it would all explode."

They stripped down again to the standard rock combo plus keyboards, but are now down to two, thanks to bandmates having difficulty appreciating the touring lifestyle and the squelching of personal ideas when bringing someone else's musical vision to life.

"I had my vision and other people wanted to make it a metal band and by God I just wasn't going to do it," Poisoner avows. Poisoner produced a 1999 CD on Pop Smear, *Great Spiders and Diamond Powder*; the title derived from the book, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*. It was published in 1841 with a chapter called "The Slow Poisoners," relating "the dastardly art of doing away with someone by placing such a small amount of arsenic in their drink on a daily basis that they don't know anything is wrong until they can't get out of bed." (Spider powder and diamond dust was a recipe revealed in this book as a good one

for slow poisoning.)

Poisoner ran with that image saying, "That is so weird, that would be a good name for a band!" After that the band had an opportunity to travel to Memphis and record at the legendary Sun Studios, which Poisoner says "prompted us to be more twangy in our sound but just as psychedelic in our head space."

In 2003, the band recorded the second album for Heyday Records, *Days of the Soft Break*. "I went through a period after I discovered Bob Dylan late in life when I decided that no other music was necessary, and I think you can hear that influence on some of the tracks," says Poisoner. While some of the songs sound as if they were sung with a British accent, Poisoner assures us that was not a deliberate intent, "although some people find it charming." He theorizes that perhaps the delivery arises from having ingested a lot of British bands during his formative years, or perhaps it was "all the acid."

"Occasionally a group of words will get stuck in my head which will become the song title," says Poisoner, then he'll fool around with a guitar until the music feels right and the words "spool forth from my brain like a murky muddy stream." Despite the discomfort the band's name can inspire, Poisoner has no interest in creating depressing music. "I was raised on the Beatles so I have ingrained in my brain the desire to make hooky chord progressions," he explains.

Also on the 10th, check out fingerstyle blues guitarist **Gordon David Kaswell** at Luna. Kaswell's style ranges widely over traditional American and British folk to contemporary rock tinged with jazz. He has built an impressive performing career, but Kaswell is also known among his peers as a talented composer. He composed the film score to *The Passionate Harvest*, an award-winning documentary about coffee agriculture, and co-authored "The Performer," a jazz tune that was featured in the ABC docu-

drama, *A Murderous Affair*, and sung on "Saturday Night Live."

Several high-profile clients (Bellissimo Media and Symantec Software among them) have also hired the talented musician to compose original music for their advertising campaigns.

Kaswell honed his acoustic guitar craft while playing coffee houses in Boston. Since those days of struggle, he has produced two CDs: *Java Roads*, which features the complete music from the coffee documentary, and *Overnight Sensation*. One song from that release, "The Price of Freedom," was a finalist in the 2003 Willamette Valley Folk Festival songwriting contest.

Interested in "Cosmic Americana?" Yes? Check out Albuquerque's **ThaMuseMeant** Friday at Cafe Paradiso. With that self-description in hand, be prepared for a night of jam rock, bluegrass, jazz and folk combined in a way that enhances all the senses. Catchy songs, vocal harmonies, guitar, har-

monica, bass, mandolin and fiddle provide an eclectic foundation for percolating percussion. Lightning-fast mandolin and fiddle picking drives this predominantly acoustic group's musical alchemy, but while you might think you know where the song is headed, the group will throw in a chord change or a mid-song time shift to project their audience farther out into space.

Vocalist/bassist Aimee Curl has a voice that channel surfs between an earthy wailing and a high mountain yodel, while singer, songwriter and guitarist Nathan Moore pens storytelling tunes a la Bob Dylan and has a voice to perfectly complement Curl's tone, when they do decide to add vocals, which is not often. Preferring to let the music reign, TheMuseMeant takes a kaleidoscopic view of the tunes, eschewing nothing if it gets a good groove going or encourages more energetic dancing. This rootsy quartet has been together for nearly 10 years, residing in New Mexico when not touring. **EW**



The Slow Poisoners play Sam Bond's Thursday, June 10.

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