

## Not Modest in the Slightest

Straight out of Sacramento, the artists formerly known as The Feeling are back with a new name and ready to rock. Now **The Spiral States**, the band is ready to get back into the scene with a new EP and a forthcoming album.

"We're not trying to be crazy experimental," says guitarist Alec Roberts-Knutila. "We're just layering a lot of things on top of each other and going with that."

"But if you listen to this new album on your headphones," bassist Allen Maxwell says, "you're going to hear things that will blow your mind."

Laying down a brand of rock that grooves like The Smiths with surf rock, The Spiral States enjoy the simpler things in music, with soft guitar melodies and vocalist James Williams crooning as if he were on a beach somewhere, looking out at the ocean. "I joined the band last," Roberts-Knutila says, "and when I joined the band was really into The Smiths and Orange Juice, and those were two bands I had never heard before. But I like them now."

With the new album on the way, the band plans to tour up and down the West Coast, seeking popularity in places other than their hometown. "Sacramento's an interesting place," Maxwell says. "There are a lot of good bands, but many that we're friends with are more popular elsewhere. It's cheap to live here, so you can have a band, afford the time and practice space, but you have to get out of town if you want a good response."

The Spiral States play with Merch at 10 pm Thursday, Aug. 10 at Luckey's. 21+ show. \$3. — *Dan Hoyt*

## Not So Over

America has a curious relationship with its musical heroes. A band can become known as "the next big thing," reach a level of success and ride that wave until, very suddenly, the wave just dissolves into mist and foam.

"Hey, whatever happened to so and so? You know, they did that one song?"

"Oh, yeah. Them. They're, like, so over."

I'm not going to pretend I'm immune to this phenomenon. When the assignment came to write about **Big Head Todd and the Monsters**, my first thought might not have been "They're so over," but I will confess to a startled "They're still together?" I honestly hadn't given them a thought in years.

Fortunately, the band has not been discouraged by my

shortsightedness. Instead, as evidenced by their 2004 CD *Live at the Fillmore* — the musical backdrop to which I am now writing — they have spent the long lonely years of my neglect developing into a solid and professional musical outfit. The things I've been missing! This is a band with chops galore, tricks a-plenty.

Boasting the same core lineup since the mid 1980s, the band's sound is built around Todd Park Mohr's songwriting and sizzling guitar work. His playing is virtuosic without being overly showy. Think the solid riff work of Eric Clapton meets the fluid flights of fancy of a Stevie Ray Vaughn or Mark Knopfler; only later, replaying the songs in your mind, do you realize how exceptional Mohr's work is.

His playing is anchored by drummer Brian Nevin and bassist Rob Squires, who have been holding down the rhythm chores since the men all met at Columbine High School in Colorado.

The band's prowess on stage is fortunate because they have

## Big Head Todd and the Monsters



reportedly released their last CD. Instead, they are opting to release new material via a regular series of "Toddcasts" available from iTunes and other podcasting services. Since the podcasts are free, the band clearly expects to derive most of its income from concert fees. A gutsy move.

Joining BHTM for their Eugene concert is Toad the Wet Sprocket. Featuring a softer, more pop-oriented sound, the band was one of the most influential voices on the alternative scene in the early '90s. Though they officially disbanded in 1998, they have twice reformed for reunion tours.

Big Head Todd and the Monsters and Toad the Wet Sprocket play at 6 pm Friday, Aug. 11 at Secret House Vineyards in Veneta. \$28 adv., \$30 dos. — *John Ginn*

## Snakes on an Attack Ship

A name inspired by *Blade Runner*, loud rock 'n' roll and a major label debut album. What could possibly be better for any rock band?

Well, this first album isn't *quite* a major label debut for **Attack Ships on Fire**, but they like to pretend it is: They titled it *Major Label Debut*. Why not be a little tricky with the fans and fool them? "Well, we thought it was funny, anyway," says vocalist Mike Bell.

The band has been around for three years now and has toured up and down this side of the country, bringing their straight up rock to strip clubs, bars, all-ages venues and anywhere an ear can be blasted off. They need no help structuring their sound, either; the new record was mixed and produced completely by the band itself.

"We worked on it for just over a year," Bell says, "and had arranged with a producer in L.A. to do all the mixing and mastering. He ran us around for about eight months and I made him send me all the original tapes. From there, I taught myself how to mix and master an album. It's completely do-it-yourself besides the duplication."

Literally, Bell pieces together life struggles, a dash of third-person character descriptions and the joys of being immature and loving it. "There are a couple songs where I've had to write from another person's perspective," he says, "but overall it's something that I've experienced or personified in terms of a particular emotion, and every once in a while we just get completely sophomoric and write a song about hangovers."

Attack Ships on Fire plays with Arroyo at 9 pm Saturday, Aug. 12 at the Samurai Duck. 21+ show. \$5. — *Dan Hoyt*

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