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Rock: The Four Raybeats

By ROBERT PALMER

THE Raybeats, who were at Hurrah on Saturday night, can be approached in one of two ways. One can wonder why four musicians who have been involved in some of the most progressive rock bands in New York are making music and sounds more like surf-rock instrumentals from the early 60's than it does like anything else. Or one can, as the saying goes, shut up and dance.

Dancing is the wisest course. The Raybeats are the most irresistible electric dance combo in New York, not because they've chosen to work in a style that has nothing in common with punk or funk (although that choice is interesting in itself), but because they do what they do so expertly

The drummer, Don Christensen, gets a marvellously fat, physical sound out of his drum kit, and he's had plenty of time to develop empathy with the bassist, George Scott — they were the rhythm section for the original Contortions. Jody Harris, the Raybeats' guitarist, was a Contortionist as well. He combines creative rhythm playing with a twangy, stuttering lead guitar style that synthesizes influences as diverse as surf music, blues, and jazz dissonance into an unusual but cogent approach.

Pat Irwin, the fourth member of the group, doubles on alto saxophone and deliberately tinny-sounding Ace organ. Like Mr. Harris he adeptly flirts with free-form elements, but without ever really disrupting the music's delightful lyricism and compulsively danceable rhythms.