



## The Raybeats

**A**ny instrumental band has the danger of being something of a novelty act," says Don Christenson, drummer for the Raybeats, perhaps the hottest instrumental combo in the U.S. since the Ventures. "We've been billed as a surf band, and some people have even called us a nostalgia act. But I don't think anybody who's really heard or seen the band could legitimately say that. I think we're as modern as anybody right now."

The Raybeats' kitschy matching uniforms — double-breasted cowboy shirts or electric-blue suits with snap-on cross ties — recall Sixties lounge acts, but their music is slangy, effervescent and up to date. Their songs meld a panoply of instrumental influences — Link Wray, Junior Walker, the Mark-Twain, surf king Dick Dale and B-movie theme music — into originals full of quick starts and hairpin turns. While Christenson and bassist Danny Amis keep the group on course, guitarist Jody Harris throws off crystalline leads, and Pat Irwin dashes from organ to sax to guitar.

The Raybeats have credentials from some of New York's more progressive new bands: Harris and Christenson played in James Chance's influential punk-funk group, the Contortions; Irwin played in the adventurous Eight-Eyed Spy. Original bassist George Scott, who died of an accidental

*Irwin, Harris, Amis and Christenson (from left)*

drug overdose last summer, had been a member of both bands.

"We're all from the Midwest," says Christenson, "so we were always into that Midwest instrumental tradition — in our different ways." All four were involved in other projects when they put together the Raybeats as a hobby in October 1979. "We were just getting together for the fun of it," says Christenson, "to see if it would work." The group had already won a wide following by the time it scored a contract with England's Beggar's Banquet Records in December.

With Amis, who joined the Raybeats in September, they recorded *Roping Wild Bears*, a four-song EP recently released by Beggar's Banquet's new subsidiary, Don't Fall Off the Mountain Records. An as-yet-untitled album produced by Martin Rushent is due out in England in late June, and the group is looking for an American label.

"It took a while for us to crack New York when we first started playing," recalls Christenson. "The crowds kept staring at us, waiting, I guess, for the star to appear — and of course that never happened. Then at some point, they'd just turn around, forget about all that, and start dancing."

—DEBRA RAE COHEN