



only in america

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Doing an article on the Raybeats is a cinch because you don't have to talk about their lyrics: they don't have any. They're an instrumental combo who mix and match regional forms into their own unique pre-psychedelic theme music, and they've had jaws dropping and bodies dancing for over a year. Now they're about to embark on a coast-to-coast tour that should expose kids to the fact that not all instrumental rock music is surf music, though sand and palm trees come easily to mind every time the Raybeats play.

That the Raybeats are even together is an affirmation that life goes on. The death of founding bassist George Scott 3d was the summer's total eclipse of the sun, affecting not only scores of fans and friends but two of New York's finest bands, the Raybeats and Eight Eyed Spy. Eight Eyed Spy was already collapsing under its own weight, but the Raybeats had been set to go into the studio for their first album, leading many to consider mournfully how great that album would have been. But now the Raybeats are back, with a new bassist/guitarist, snappy new uniforms and their instrumental sound intact.

"I knew Danny would be perfect when he played me both sides of *The World of Leonard Nimoy*," cracks drummer Don Christenson in the band's dressing room out at Maxwell's. In fact new bassist Danny Amos was probably perfect when you consider that his Minneapolis band, the

Overtones, was one of the only bands in the world doing something remotely similar to what the Raybeats are up to. The Overtones, reportedly more of a surf band than the Raybeats, opened for them in Minneapolis several months ago and when news of George's death came, Danny volunteered his services.

One of the tragic aftereffects of George's death was the break-up of a trio of musicians who had long worked so well together. Both Donny and guitarist Jody Harris were with George in the original Contortions, and one of the reasons why the Raybeats sounded so good from the very beginning was the tremendous affinity among the three. Yet the Contortions initiated a whole new wave of funk bands; how is it that the Raybeats purvey a particularly white musical form?

Jody doesn't see it as being *all* that different. "With the Contortions I played guitar the way I play guitar. James [Chance] tried to direct us, but George played his lead-guitar bass, and Donny played his hip pocket soul." The music *can* be really soulful, and the ranges it takes — not just from one ethnic strain to another, but from downright dirty to downright pretty — is staggering. Says organist/saxist/guitarist (and visual frontman) Pat Irwin, "Not writing for a lyricist, it's a real challenge coming up with the melodies. But we like people humming our tunes."