

Tom Curren

Surf Legend Quietly Delivers Third Album

JUDGING BY HIS casual pithiness in conversation and vague details offered during an interview, Tom Curren doesn't do a lot of press. As one of the preeminent wave riders of the last two decades—if Kelly Slater is the sport's LeBron James, then Curren is its Michael Jordan—he's embraced the mystique of the quiet, introverted soul surfer. So, for the uninitiated, it may be a surprise to hear Curren crooning fortified acoustic-rock numbers, such as "As Long As," "Moon" and "Unconditional" from his new album *In Plain View*.

"It's a challenge to make something that you like," he says. "Music is something that fascinates me and I like to work at it. Because it is work—it's not easy."

Curren, a multi-instrumentalist, has played music since he



was a teenager and credits a youth group instructor and a "good music teacher" at Santa Barbara High School for giving him the basic tools he needed to musically explore. "Mostly, I played drums and made stuff up—I didn't have any form," he admits of his early days.

A few years after winning his third world surfing title in 1990,

Curren went into a semi-retirement from the sport and, subsequently, began to focus more on music, touring the country with a group dubbed Skipping Urchins, which he later rechristened Plankten (among other names). He describes that music as "long jams, long instrumentals and a lot of funk that actually had a

hip-hop side to it. We had big, juicy riffs."

Curren's earlier albums—which are either less produced or instrumental—don't hold a candle to the crisp, John Alagia-led *In Plain View*, which places the sound squarely in the realm of the producer's previous clients, such as John Mayer or Jason Mraz. (The album also benefits from legendary drummer Jim Keltner's contributions on three tracks.)

While Curren's sound may have developed, his band remains the same as it was in the '90s, featuring fellow surfer/musicians guitarist William Kimball and bassist Chris Swann. And this group dynamic offers the former champ something that competitive surfing couldn't.

"When the band is sounding like it should, it's a team effort," he explains. "It's more collective than individualistic." **Josh Baron**

GROUP AT WORK

Barn Owl

Desert Music

"THE DESERT is barren and empty but carries a certain weight—it's a heavy place. A desert landscape can be inviting but remote, familiar but alien," explains Jon Porras, half of the ambient-doom duo Barn Owl, while describing the group's sonic ties to the arid abyss for the better part of their six years in operation. "These paradoxes are interesting to investigate musically in terms of creating sounds that are captivating and melodic while intense and dark. The expansive horizons and motionless landscape translate nicely into long-form, atmospheric music.

"The lack of sensory input

can have a reflective effect, turning thoughts inward," adds his partner Evan Caminiti. "At the same time, there is this sensation of opening you up to a new perspective—an ego-dissolving experience that helps us see how small we are in the scheme of everything."

After relocating their practice space to an industrial section of their adopted city of San Francisco, Porras and Caminiti recently shifted their desolation-drone rock toward a more electronically enhanced avenue of avant-mind music on their latest full-length *V*. They cite German minimalist techno giant Basic Channel, Hungarian electro-acoustic maestro Ákos Rózman and Miles Davis' 1974 afro-fusion masterpiece *Get Up with It* as influential forces pushing the processing techniques of their new material. But the chief



catalyst in Barn Owl's artistic redirection is dub, not in the default echo-drenched riddim way that you might expect but, in the reggae subgenre's spiritualized proclivity for deconstruction.

"There is a general openness to abstracting sound—reusing broken or old equipment in unexpected ways, splicing and manipulating tape speeds, blurring sound with delay and

effects," Porras says of dub's inspiration. "When making *V*, we used the studio, soundboard, mixers and recording equipment as instruments."

"The idea of fragmenting and reshaping sound is what is exciting to me about dub," adds Caminiti. "There is a vibrant energy transmitted through this very spiritual music, which I find very inspiring." **Ron Hart**

Joseph Aguirre (Curren); Anthony Masters