

Beachy Bohemians

The Bossa Nova Beatniks turn the lilt of tropical island music into an idiosyncratic mélange fit for the edgiest downtown club.

By **JOSHUA TANZER**
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If Dave Thomas of Pere Ubu ever — and I'm not saying this ever, ever happens — but if he ever flies to the Caribbean, dons sunglasses, reclines on a beach towel, sips a margarita and sings merrily along to a Harry Belafonte record, he could sound just like the Bossa Nova Beatniks.

Of course, he'd need a fun-lovin' drummer, bouncy bass, a bongo player and a silkily harmonious sidekick to really complete the picture. That's the kind of lineup that Tom Gould has put together, playing their own something's-not-quite-right-here, downtown-coffeehouse version of tropical music.

The band started as more of a straight-ahead rock band under the name Flyboys a good 10 years ago, but that was fraught with problems, Gould says. For one thing, that's when the TV show "In Living Color" was popularizing "flygirls."

"Every time we'd show up someplace as the Flyboys, people would show up expecting to hear a hip-hop band," Gould recalls. When the bass player spontaneously introduced him one night as "that bossa nova beatnik" and the band subsequently adopted the name, that was, well, at least a little closer to the mark. "We did have people showing up in salsa outfits expecting to do Latin dancing."

If not Latin, the Beatniks play a little Brazilian, a little Caribbean, a little rock, blues and New Orleans music, all in a sparsely arranged mélange that might have had '50s hipsters snapping their fingers and saying, "Groovy, daddy-o."

BOSSA NOVA BEATNIKS

Tom Gould (b,v), Tori Mierlak (v), Tim Stapleton (percussion,v), George Vahamonde (d).

[Official site](#)

TRACKS

On streamingRealAudio and MP3:

- "Zantee Misfits" (3:44, 3.4MB) [RA](#), [MP3](#).
- "Papa la Ska" (4:41, 4.2MB) [RA](#), [MP3](#).
- "Ack" (6:19, 5.7MB) [RA](#), [MP3](#).
- "Heart to Beat" (4:15, 3.9MB) [RA](#), [MP3](#).
- "Deanne (Where Did You Go?)" (3:52, 3.5MB) [RA](#), [MP3](#).
- "Red Red Johnny" (4:15, 3.8MB) [MP3](#).

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Their inspiration can be found anywhere from Jamaica, as on "Papa la Ska" (hear it on [RealAudio](#) or [MP3](#)), to the B movies, as on "Ack Ack" ([RA](#), [MP3](#)), a tribute to the Tim Burton film "Mars Attacks."

Oddly, there's no guitar, keyboard or horns in the current lineup, only bass, percussion and voices, and that's the way they like it. "If we had a guitar player, we would be just another band in a lot of ways, whereas now people say, 'Oh, you're the Beatniks — you do that *different* thing," Gould says. But, he adds, that could change anytime.

"Look, we're going to do what we do and get ourselves out there, and the right person will come up and say, look, this is how I fit," he says. "We're kind of waiting for that."

This incarnation of the band has been together for four years, and includes two 19-year-old members fresh out of high school in Long Island, where Gould is a district employee — and a minor legend among the students. In

fact, that's how he met the younger Beatniks, Tori Mierlak (that's her on "Heart to Beat," [RA](#), [MP3](#)) and Tim Stapleton — they had caught on to the band's tropically inspired music during high school and once performed "Girl from Ipanema" at a school talent show. Gould was stunned.

"I looked at this and I said, 'Well, how about that!' I knew that music and culture were cyclical and I was just waiting for this to come around," he says.

After four years with the band, the two have now gone on to music school — Mierlak at Berklee in Boston and Stapleton at Miami — so the Beatniks have most of their gigs during the summer vacation, including a lot of outdoor festivals on the island as well as city nightclubs. Of course, this is warm-weather, sit-back-with-a-margarita music, so that's just fine. Just be sure to catch them now before the beach towels are all rolled up for the year and the Beatniks are back on the road.

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See The Beatniks ---

Tues July 17, 2001- The Hansom House

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256 Elm St., Southampton, NY [Visit Jessie's website](#) (631) 283-9772

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