

This guitar ambassador knows less is more

CALGARY BAND: Ramblin' Ambassadors new album, Vista Cruiser Country Squire, built on short solos

In concert

The Ramblin' Ambassadors

Where: Railway Club, 579 Dunsmuir St.

When: Tomorrow night at 9

Tickets: \$10 at the door

BY TOM HARRISON
STAFF REPORTER

I'm guilty of listening to the introductory themes to the various CSI TV shows because they use three of The Who's signature tunes and they sound terrific. Guilty, because who tunes in to TV shows for their theme? "Won't Get Fooled Again" or "Baba O'Reilly" might have been recorded nearly 40 years ago but

even in their edited form, they still are great.

They make you wish you'd been the engineer when guitarist Pete Townshend found his sound and how to record it. This tiny revelation wouldn't have anything to do with The Ramblin' Ambassadors were it not for Brent Cooper's instant identification. He, too, is a long-time lover of the sound of an electric guitar. "And he's just playing one note," notes Cooper of Townshend's power.

Ah, but it's a great note, and proves yet again that less is more. The Ramblin' Ambassadors don't sound a bit like The Who, but Cooper understands the less-is-more idea. The Calgary band's second album, *Vista Cruiser Country Squire*, is surf and car instrumentals built on short but

pointed guitar solos.

"Brevity has its strong point," Cooper believes. "There's only a few guys who can play long solos — Jimi Hendrix, maybe Jimmy Page."

The Ramblin' Ambassadors are Cooper getting back to basics. As guitarist for Huevos Rancheros, he saw the band getting harder and away from the surf twang with which it started. His current band is less monolithic, more varied, dynamic and measurably quieter.

"The funny thing is," the guitarist explains, "Ramblin' Ambassadors were playing before Huevos called it quits. We didn't like each other. We were getting heavy by that time. I wanted to get back to a more roots sound. We asked ourselves, how can we have more fun?"

"When you listen to the last Huevos album [2000's *Muerte del*



Calgary's Ramblin' Ambassadors.

Toro], we brought in an organ player. We should have done more of that. With The Ramblin' Ambassadors, we can be quieter and hold back."

The band was formed by Cooper with Scott Nickless and Tyler Pickering. It released its first album, *Avanti*, in 2003. Now a quartet with the addition of surf guitar aficionado Gentleman Doug, The Ramblin' Ambassadors are the band Cooper wanted Huevos Rancheros to be.

"For a guy who can't sing, the guitar is my voice," he says. "I've always loved the sound of guitar."

Cooper cites Link Wray's block-busting instrumental "Rumble" as having a profound impact. "Rumble" is as powerful as Pete Townshend's one-chord crunch and is mightily visceral.

"I'm a hack," Cooper states. "I love Charlie Christian and the way he changed the guitar but my Charlie Christian would be Link Wray."

tharrison@png.canwest.com

The Province

It starts here.



The music speaks for itself

The Ramblin' Ambassadors effortlessly make old fashioned instru-rock in a digital age

Link Wray, Duane Eddy, The Ventures - these giants of instrumental rock from days gone by conjure images of dusty old 45s spinning as vibrato blasts out of vintage speakers. Old-timers will tell you they don't make 'em like that any more. They'd be wrong.

Calgary's own Ramblin' Ambassadors are part of a devoted group of riff-savvy musicians with an ear for the past. Their sophomore Mint records release proves they do make 'em like they used to, almost. Vista Cruiser Country Squire may not have been recorded on massive two-inch reel to reels, but the end result is no less authentic. "This is the first tapeless album I ever made," explains lead guitarist Brent Cooper. "That was a bit of a leap of faith."

After a tenure in such legendary local bands as The Will and Huevos Rancheros, Cooper is no stranger to the studio. This time, he and his fellow Ambassadors moved into the digital age with acclaimed producer and friend Russ Broom. The goal was to make a record they all enjoyed and have a fun time doing it. They set up shop in the Ambassadors' jam space, swapped stories, beer and pizza and cranked out the 12 instru gems that make up Vista Cruiser Country Squire. Cooper's biggest concern was that going digital almost led to Broom making the band seem too talented.

"Russ could go in and completely adjust every note you play to make it right if you wanted to," says Cooper. "Let's drag a good note from another

part of the song and put it in there.... And this is why so many albums sound too good.... Some of that rock 'n' rollness is just erased."

That's not to say that Cooper had to be dragged kicking and screaming into the world of zeroes and ones. Some analogue snobs are hell bent on living in the past, but that's not his game. "I find if you are too much a slave to the retro then you can never surpass the songs from those days," he explains. "Not that we want to say we're better than The Ventures, but you are stuck. You're only as good as your haircut and you're only as good as the amplifier you play. We just play it. We do have an ear for the retro, but it's not our reason for being. We just want to make fun instrumental music that we like."

Every one of the dozen tracks on Vista Cruiser Country Squire tastefully acknowledge the past without sounding dated. They offer sizzling covers of The Bel-Airs' "Kamikaze" and two discrete takes on "Cecilia Ann" by The Surftones, but the real magic on Vista Cruiser Country Squire is the originals. The soaring solos of "Speed Wobble," the easy charm of "Lonesome Rambler" or the frantic



The Ramblin' **Ambassadors**

blowout of "Cupcakes di Milo" all work as well as any classic surf track. Even stronger than their debut *Avanti*, this record is the product of a band working together more than ever before.

"The instrumental thing is kind of my thing, and it has become our thing," says Cooper. "We're at a point where we're a band. It's not so much a Brent Cooper thing. It's a Ramblin' Ambassadors thing."

And that thing - despite having a long history - still confuses those outside the fold. It sounds like a joke, but there have been people in the crowd in front of Cooper as he plays who felt bad for the band because their singer didn't show up. In some people's minds, playing without vocals has its limitations. Cooper agrees, but he says that's what makes it work.

"Instrumental rock 'n' roll is a genre," he says. "In any genre, there are restraints that make it a genre. I think that gives you the freedom to play around within that. We understand the rules and constraints of making instrumental music, but we get to do our own thing within that."

Cooper admits that someday he'd love to play in a band with a singer, but for now he's more than happy to keep Ramblin'. "I think the songs are good enough that they speak for themselves. They don't need a singer."

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THE RAMBLIN' AMBASSADORS **Vista Cruiser Country Squire**

It's been almost five years since this Calgary instrumental band released their *Avanti* debut, and seven since the demise of guitarist Brent J. Cooper's similar outfit, *Huevos Rancheros*. Like *Avanti*, this new one is named after a car that's pictured on the front cover. Also like its predecessor, *VCCS* features some fine surf, twang and garage rock that showcases the talents of the group members. There's a rumbling bass line on opener "Camino Real," some big drums on "Frank Slide Song," and Cooper turns in some impressive soloing on "Lonesome Rambler," which would be a good soundtrack to a nightclub scene in a '60s-based movie. In addition to eight originals, there are two versions (one faster, one slower) of The Surftones' "Cecilia Ann" (which has also been covered by the Pixies), The Bel-Airs' "Kamikaze" and Canadian brethren The Sadies' "Rat Creek." If you dig this kind of music, it's hard to go wrong with *Vista Cruiser Country Squire*.

Steve McLean

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The Ramblin' Ambassadors

THE RAMBLIN' AMBASSADORS Vista Cruiser Country Squire

With their timeless sound and reverence for classic surf, Calgary's the Ramblin' Ambassadors render these new songs with impressive muscular vigour. Featuring Brent J. Cooper (Huevos Rancheros) on lead guitar, listeners expecting punchy rhythms and twang-y, tremolo-enriched notes are rewarded. What's unique about the Ramblin' Ambassadors, however, is their resistance to any beach blanket posturing. While there are frills and some inherent quirkiness within their musicianship, the band's arrangements are meaningful and free of contrivance. Surftones cover "Cecilia Ann" is a tightly wound ball of energy whose rich guitar lines soar over the exuberant drums and double bass of Tyler Pickering and Scott Nickless. Like a good old Western frontier number by Calxico, "Frank Slide Song" is evocative, just as "Lonesome Rambler" hints at Drive Like Jehu tones, only to morph into playful blues. Complete with a crack at the Sadies' "Rat Creek," Vista Cruiser Country Squire firmly establishes the Ramblin' Ambassadors as one of the finest instrumental outfits around. (Mint)

Vish Kanna

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THE RAMBLIN' AMBASSADORS VISTA CRUISER COUNTRY SQUIRE (Mint Records)

Vista Cruiser Country Squire has the rare quality of serving as a pleasant aural background when played on low, but transforms into full-throttle revelry once the volume is turned up. This dichotomy is not surprising from the Calgary band that formed on a dare, with a children's grade school teacher as their lead guitarist, and a first release (*Avanti*) that included a song fantasizing about obtaining a fragment of Billy Gibbons' (of ZZ Top) beard and storing it in a safe deposit box.

The musicianship of the band is evident throughout this sophomore release, as each of the dozen tracks are instrumental and yet retain distinct personalities. Song titles hold greater significance--without lyrics to rely on, they are the only clues for deciphering the meaning behind the music. Some topics are immediately identifiable: "Frank Slide Song" references an historical event, and "Camino Real," a Tennessee Williams play. More winsomely obscure titles, like "Cabbage Diablo" (digestive problems as a result of Ukrainian food) and "Cupcakes di Milo" (an armless burlesque performer) entail pestering the schoolteacher while nursing a well-earned hangover. As well as being the most imaginatively named, the two song titles are also the most sultry selections on the album, with guitar grooves as reminiscent of the Cramps as they are of Dick Dale. This is perhaps another example of the band's duality, as you'd be just as likely to find Poison Ivy doing the surfer stomp as you would Gidget.

Melissa Smith

Discorder Magazine



The Ramblin' **Ambassadors**

THE RAMBLIN' AMBASSADORS **Vista Cruiser Country Squire**

The buzz about the booming Calgary music scene has discounted some of the better bands that have spent their years playing in our fair city. While people are freaking out over bands like Azeda Booth and Woodpigeon, they forget their roots. Groups like Huevos Rancheros, who spent their time playing instrumental surf-rock all over town, have fallen by the wayside in favour of hot, new indie acts.

Sadly, the Rancheros have gone on a hiatus--they haven't released an album since 1999--but lead guitarist Brent Cooper still brings cool Dick Dale-esque '50s doo-wop to Calgary with the Ramblin' Ambassadors. Vista Cruiser Country Squire is reminiscent of the time that the social conservatives want us to return to: the 1950s. Easy going tunes like "Kamikaze" and "Besa Me Bottom Turn" evokes the simpler time of breaking out the great red Cadillac shark and driving along the highway, trying to out-race the captain of the football team to the coast for a nifty beach party with your high school honey.

The only bad thing about the album is that because of its instrumental nature, the entire CD can run together. There's not a whole lot of distinction between the tracks--which isn't such a big deal, really, but nothing really sticks out from the greater album.

The Gauntlet

gauntlet.ucalgary.ca/story/12435

THE RAMBLIN' AMBASSADORS **Vista Cruiser Country Squire**

Featuring the killer guitar twang of Brent Cooper of Huevos Rancheros, these wheat field surfers from Calgary, Ontario freak on the beach with originals and covers of songs by The Bel-Airs, The Surftones and The Sadies.

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[/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12746&Itemid=48](http://www.rcreader.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12746&Itemid=48)



The Ramblin' **Ambassadors**

THE RAMBLIN' AMBASSADORS **Vista Cruiser Country Squire**

For all of you readers that aren't familiar with the geography of Canada, I'm going to solve a riddle for you. There's no ocean in the lovely province of Alberta. Instead you get a series of rivers, mountains and prairie terrain. Couple that with the fact it is as cold as a whore's heart, and you might wonder how a surf rock band like The Ramblin' Ambassadors can exist?

The answer, as their new record - Vista Cruiser Country Squire - proves, is by somehow mixing two parts hillbilly with one part Dick Dale and one part Spicoli to create a sound that is pretty well unique. Sure, Surfabilly is something lots of bands run with, but try to picture Corb Lund leaving his horses at home and trying to kick it for a few weeks at Huntington beach. The Ramblin' Ambass have all the shimmery, vintage sounds (the songs are laced in tremolo), but they still have the dusty textures and feedback you'd expect to come from heavy bearded, plaid shirt wearing, tattooed hombres.

Camino Real opens the effort and while you settle into the joyous surf guitar, you get a wake up call from the distortion and grit that settles at the bottom of the mix. Cecilia Ann uses the same recipe, and the suprising surge really pushes the band past sounding like another Dick Dale/Ventures outfit, and more into the realm of the Red Elvises. Cupcakes De Milo has some feverish guitar work, heavy punk rawking drums and I guess if I wanted to put the sound in perspective, I'd say that if you wanted to surf to this music, you'd be the guys they talked about in Dogtown and Z-boys that would fight you over a wave.

That's not to say the band isn't routed in the classic sounds. They take the time to pay homage with covers of The Surftones and The Bel-Airs, it's just that they are trying to put their stamp on the genre. Perhaps the biggest treat for the listener is their take on the Sadies track, Rat Creek. The Ambassador's keep the crashing drums and high energy, but add a bit more of the California sun to the track, and the result is terrific.

I know most people think surf rock was played out after Pulp Fiction (or maybe after the Fatboys dropped Wipeout), but this record gives the sounds the kick in the teeth needed to keep you listening for 11 songs. Don't believe me? Just listen to the guitar solo on March of Dimes and enjoy.

www.herohill.com

/2008/04/reviews-ramblin-ambassadors-vista.htm



THE RAMBLIN' AMBASSADORS

After more than a decade of instrumental twang, Calgary's Huevos Rancheros had come to a standstill. Rather than sit around doing nothing, guitarist Brent Cooper pulled together a few friends and they headed out as the Ramblin' Ambassadors. Cooper admits that more than just the band has changed in his life over the past few years with the Ambassadors. "The other guys all have other bands as well, but for me, because of my busy lifestyle now I can't dedicate as much time to music as I used to," he explains over the phone from his home in Calgary. "But having said that, we still play once or twice a month and we're working on a new album, so I'm kind of busy." Kind of busy doesn't really do Cooper's situation justice. In addition to music and being a dad, he's also into his second year of a new career as an elementary school teacher, something he's especially excited about. "Well, actually, it's pretty awesome, really," he laughs. "I teach for a school that's sort of half Degrassi and half Fame, so I'm always playing guitar. I've got a turntable in the classroom and I force the kids to listen to Link Wray or Dick Dale or Benny Goodman, so that's good for me. And it's not that different from being in a band. It's all noisy and fart jokes and stuff." -EDEN MUNRO / eden@vueweekly.com

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/article.php?id=5405

The Ramblin'
Ambassadors

Vista Cruiser Country Square



The Ramblin' **Ambassadors**

THE RAMBLIN' AMBASSADORS

If you've never heard the term 'surf music' before, it is a term that describes the type of sound that came from the surfing scene in the mid-50's. It is a traditionally instrumental guitar based rock, some popular examples are 'Wipe-Out' and the theme song from Pulp Fiction, written by Surf rock legend Dick Dale.

That said, there is a slim time frame that this music was pure; before it was popularized with the Beach Boys and general California-craze of the early 60's. There have been many bands over the years who have emulated the sound with slight variations, and it has even regained popularity again in the late 80's with the Kids in the Hall theme song done surf style, and an outbreak of Canadian bands produced a fairly authentic surf sound. Bands like Shadowy Men on a Shadowy Planet and Huevos Rancheros have kept up appearances for the Surfer dudes of decades past; not adding too much to the music, but certainly not taking away.

The Ramblin' Ambassadors recent release on Mint Records has a big old woody on it, you know, one of those station wagons you'd tour in if you were cruisin' for birds back in the day. Now you'd use that sort of thing to get to gigs. The band formed out of a need to fill an empty spot in a local promoter's schedule, with ex-Huevos Rancheros wrangling together a new group of fellas to play the same old stuff. There really is only so much you can do while maintaining the pure 50's instrumental Surf sound, nothing ground breaking on their May 15th release Vista Cruiser Country Squire. But it is no less, a fun listen while driving on the highway, being a ramblin' bastard... as the name politely suggests. If you are a fan of surf music and like it in pure form make sure to visit their site and see when they ramble through your town, and where you can pick up their new album.

space.canoe.ca

IndieJAM/blog/view/218371



The Ramblin' **Ambassadors**

Long Live Mint Records!!

As noted in the Young And Sexy review posted here earlier today, Mint generously sent us two (count 'em 2!!) tasty records for our review, for which we are simultaneously entirely grateful and thrilled to bits!

The second of the two is this completely groovy and rockin' collection of instrumental brilliance called Vista Cruiser Country Squire by the Ramblin' Ambassadors. What a great party disc! There's a lot of surf twang here, and some rockabilly and punky goodness too. This is a pure romp through good times, no doubt about it!

Now, I don't know that they can get much surfing done in Calgary, but these guys surely have picked up on the essentials of that genre's sound, and here they once again offer it up with stupendous aplomb. Think Dick Dale and the Del-Tones mixed with some Reverend Horton Heat (sans vox), and you're getting close! Jack Johnson this ain't!

There's such a cool groove here that these songs would probably be ruined if they had lyrics. My ear already naturally wants to embrace the guitar lines and that steady, swinging bass and drum combo anyway, and here there is so much to feast on it's gotta be embarrassing to be lesser acts, aspiring one day to sound as good as this. Look, if this record doesn't make you wanna get up and dance, or drive really fast... or maybe both at the same time... there's gotta be something wrong with you!

All of the original tunes here are delicious aural proof that these guys know exactly what they're doing. The reverb-filled, Danelectro-sounding guitar work is stellar, and the bass sounds like its own lead line while the drums bounce and swing under perfect control. And yet there's a sense that they are purposely still managing to make the whole

affair sound just that little bit gritty, exactly like it should be. Sweet!

Add to all of this bliss the three cover tunes offered here: Cecelia Ann, which is included here as two different tracks at two different tempos (rockin', and slinky cool), is a Surftones track. Kamikaze is by the Bel-Airs, and Rat Creek is, as you are all well aware of course, a song by the Sadies. Oh man, could you imagine seeing the Ramblin' Ambassadors in concert with the Sadies? Wow! The dance floor would have to be huge! What a great, great, great night of music that would be! Hey, whomever sets these shows up... Please make it happen near my house! That would rock!!

So, after all that breathlessness, you already know I'm gonna tell you to find out everything you can about this band (follow the convenient link to to the Mint web site on the left of this page!), and then that you have no choice but to run out and buy this record as soon as it hits the street, right? So what the hell are you waiting for? Go! Go! Go, already!

Long live the reverb! Humungous thanks again,
Mighty Mint Records!

music-kma.livejournal.com/77116.html

