



# Taught to be Proud

BY JOE DOHERTY

Most artists floating about the pop music cosmos these days are bought and sold in a marketplace. Just look at the most recent musical trends of the past half decade or so: boy bands, rap-rock, emo, hip-hop—the list goes on. Such blurry faced corporate-molded soon-to-be-where-are-they-now artists like Limp Bizkit, the Backstreet Boys and Ricky Martin have ultimately been chewed up by the public and then spit back out.

So what happens to bands that don't fit snugly into the current pop climate? San Francisco's Tea Leaf Green can provide the answer.

"In the beginning when we were touring the country we weren't making any money and didn't have much time off in between shows," says bassist Ben Chambers speaking to *Artvoice* from his California pad. "We couldn't really afford hotel rooms so we just kind of crammed ourselves in the RV."

The quartet, who tightly knits snippets of folk, electronica and psychedelic fusion into a cohesive blanket, first played together as high-school buddies in Arcada, Calif. Guitarist/vocalist Josh Clark and drummer Scott Rager added Chambers to the mix, and later, their principal songwriter, keyboardist/vocalist Trevor Garrod.

## Headin' Down to Bonnaroo

The band burst into the "jamband" scene with a stellar performance at Northern California's High Sierra Music Festival in 2000. Five years later, the group found itself in front of ten thousand screaming fans at Tennessee's fourth annual Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival.

"It was of one of those special shows that reminds you why you want to perform in front of people," Chambers says. "The crowd was just on fire. I mean it was one o'clock in the afternoon and 100 degrees out, and ten thousand people still showed up to see us play."

Quite suddenly, Tea Leaf Green had morphed into a venerable tour de force on the scene. The group expanded its performance schedule, and fans—many of whom just wanted to see what the fuss was about—came out accordingly. In less than six years,

## Tea Leaf Green

**Saturday, March 25.**

Doors open at 8pm (all ages)

**Town Ballroom, 681 Main St.**

**(852-3900)**

Tickets: \$10 advance, \$12 at the door.

the band went from playing Bay Area house parties to posh East Coast theatres three thousand miles away from home.

"Now it's getting a lot better for us," Chambers says. "We're making more money, getting bigger crowds—I mean we're still all poor—but it's nicer. We can actually expect people to be at the shows now, as opposed to two years ago we'd be happy to have 50 people there."

## Living Organically

Tea Leaf Green, like many of the group's "jamband" brethren, knows not of radio airplay or MTV videos. Chambers says things like grassroots promotion on Internet message boards and opening for former Phish frontman Trey Anastasio have been keys to the band's success.

"It was great playing with Trey and meeting him," Chambers says. "He told us a lot of fun stories of what he went through in the early Phish days in comparison to us. It was kind of specific to where we're at—kind of like a 'keep on doing it' type deal."

In spite of near-constant touring last summer, the band managed to record its fourth studio effort, *Taught to be Proud* (Reincarnate Music). The album, which was recorded in a barn in the sun-baked hills of California, lays bare the group's most polished recording to date. The disc is layered with beautiful, rustic compositions that mirror the band's everyday life.

"A lot of times studios are aesthetically unpleasing," Chambers says. "And here we are in a barn with horses and different animals running around. The actual vibe of the album was strong because of that."

They may not work on a farm, but Tea Leaf Green genuinely earns their keep. Nothing is handed to them. av

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