



Guest No. 66 (from left): Ken Smith, Steve Bragg, Bob Howard and Bryce Goldstein.  
PHOTOS BY SESAR SANCHEZ

## Sonic kicks

**T**iny computer speakers are no match for the charisma of Bob Howard's singular voice. In fact, such thin sonic range might contribute to the rueful, nostalgic vibe when he sings: "I fell in love with your voice on the radio .... All those lonely nights, music saved my life a time or two."

It's a sentiment that perfectly complements the sound of winter rain on this writer's roof, but the sound of the music on "Where Have All the DJ's Gone?" by Howard's latest Chico band, Guest No. 66, probably doesn't match what you're thinking. It's actually an uptempo piece, with a locomotive snare pushing the action, while a soft-stepping bassline and Howard's croaking talk-singing provide a spooky contrast to the bright energy.

It's weird as hell, but it's not even the weirdest song on the Guest No. 66 debut

## GET LOST IN THE TRIPPY SOUNDSCAPES OF GUEST NO. 66

three-song demo, *Radioland*. The newly born band made up of Chico music vets is offering something completely different to the scene, which is exactly its intention.

"It's really exciting for me personally," said Ken Smith, local ukulele player for much-loved local bands the Michelin Embers and Hallelujah Junction (and former CN&R staff writer) who is spreading his musical wings extra wide for this new project, incorporating all manner of noise-makers, including loop pedals, a Theremin, oscillator, chord organ and more.

"I get to try things I've always wanted to try. In my other bands, I show up with a uke and I'm ready to go, but in this band I'm trying to manifest the shit I hear in my head with a bunch of weird instruments and second-hand electronics. It's fun and challenging. I even need to learn to solder."

With Howard (who also sings for The Vesuvians and

plays guitar in Empty Gate) as the self-described "delegating dictator," the band is rounded out by accordionist/bassist Bryce Goldstein and local drumming legend Steve Bragg (formerly of Vomit Launch and co-conspirator with Howard in The Asskickers, Vesuvians, etc.) playing a bizarre cymbal-free drumkit made from converted beer kegs.

In a backyard studio in the nether regions of the Barber neighborhood, this reporter had a chance to be a fly on the wall at a rehearsal of this new creative conglomeration.

Upon arrival, the group was ensconced at the private bar next to the studio watching some sort of stripper-themed music-video-

awards show, which segued into a BBC presentation of championship darts, which provoked a conversation about the mathematical intricacies of darts-scoring ending with Bragg's conclusion that "Darts should be taught in grammar school. It teaches math, and hand-eye

coordination, and it's got you throwing sharp objects at a target. Kids would love it."

At rehearsal, the band settled into the expansive, evocative sound that marks the bulk of its repertoire. A tune called "FBI" shimmered into existence riding waves emanating from Smith's array of electronic toys. And as Howard's spacey guitar chords meshed with a fluid bass line and muted snare-and-tom beat, a sample of police scanner chatter from Smith's corner created an element of narrative tension. And like a confectioner adding a finishing touch, Smith sprinkled chiming autoharp across the top.

Having been performing for only a few months, Guest No. 66 still has more live theatrical components it'd like to add to the band's soundtrack sound.

"We want it to be more than just a band," Smith said, "and to experiment with building different narratives with each set, and for it to be open to incorporating art, film and other media as we progress."

—CAREY WILSON

### Be their guests:

Feb. 22, 9 p.m., at Downtown Ale House (Red Bluff) with Dead Bird Son.  
March 29, 8 p.m., at The Maltese with Preening and Beehive.

Listen to the *Radioland* demo at [guestno66.bandcamp.com](http://guestno66.bandcamp.com).

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