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Music: Deluge of support

Flooded guitarist is back with new album, higher pant legs

by Matt Kramer

Saturday night provides a heartwarming holiday ending to the flooding and the storm damage that devastated usually mellow Marin County last year. This year we've shivered through a cold snap, but we're fairly fortunate weather-wise right now. Hit hard during last year's holiday deluge was musician and music teacher Tom Finch, whose home studio was, for a while, under 4 feet of muddy rain runoff. Shortly afterward, Fairfax's 19 Broadway, which also suffered damage in that intensely stormy weather, hosted a benefit fund-raiser for Finch. The number of local musicians who signed up to perform is a testament to the good-natured guitarist. A partial list includes Leon Bristow, the Roadside Daisies, Larkin Gayl, Rahman D'Amato, Pollyanna Bush and Big Brother and the Holding Company. The benefit show brought out the best, not only in the musicians, but in the general community—as the nightclub was packed that night. Finch himself, who played in three or four bands that evening, took time to chat with me while he was wrestling with some cables in-between sets. Though Finch was working hard, he was smiling and seemed almost overwhelmed when he said, "I feel very loved and supported."

As I haven't chatted with him since that busy night—I prefer to lurk quietly in the shadows at most shows—I figure Finch could not have imagined then that he would be releasing a new recording less than a year after finding one of his acoustic guitars floating on coffee-colored water. But happily for him (and for the Tom Finch Group as well as local music fans), that is exactly the case. The group has recently held CD release celebrations at other venues—some of them on the same block as 19 Broadway—but this Saturday's performance brings last year's benefit full circle. And, as this show takes place the night before New Year's Eve, it's a fine, feel-good way to kick off the end-of-the-year celebration a little bit early. (And it doesn't hurt that the Tom Finch Group's self-titled disc features world-infused rock and funk that establishes the perfect party mood for this long party weekend.) Finch's penchant for mixing jazz and Latin elements into rock is deftly demonstrated throughout the CD (check out songs such as "Sofia" and "Flyin' High"). Though I listen to a lot less electric rock-genre guitar than I used to, at times I just have to stop what I'm doing and concentrate when Finch flies into one of his solos. Fast, furious and always clean, Tom Finch's fretwork is impressive. You can sample tracks from this fantastic Fairfax band on at least two sites that I know of. Go to www.web.mac.com/tomfinchgroup/Music.html or <http://cdbaby.com/cd/tomfinchgroup>. The disc is also available in digital form at iTunes.

The lyrics on the disc, in rock and hip-hop styles, are conscious and positive, which brings to mind what a lot of the fund-raiser musicians told me last year. They didn't just talk about Finch's talent and attitude as a musician—each person I asked said that the community came out in full force because Finch is such a positive, productive and supportive *person*. Last year we rallied to help him in a time of need; this time around let's go out and help him celebrate.