



Isla Vista band the Hairbrain Scheme — adjectives like weird, eclectic, and bizarre just don't do it justice; you've got to see it to believe it.

# SCHOOLHOUSE ROCK

Get Down with Isla Vista's **Hairbrain Scheme** | by Drew Atkins

**L**ike a lion stalking zebras, the Hairbrain Scheme approached the Isla Vista music scene slowly and carefully. The small, docile beachside community was introduced to their existence at a very casual pace, with shows very few and far between — usually at house parties — and stickers scattered here and there. You could write off the band as a joke, if you felt like it. Many did.

“When we first started playing as Hairbrain Scheme, a lot of the bands around here would make fun of us constantly,” says keyboardist Chris Nava. “They’d call us ‘circus freaks.’ But then, little by little, they all started hovering around us all the time at our practice place. It developed from them hating us to them realizing that it was totally intuitive to love everything we do. People gradually just submitted.”

We’re in bassist Nate Harris’ living room. An Elvis movie plays on the television — the one where the King goes to Hawaii — and Harris, Nava, and singer Grant Parsons are watching in an inattentive way. It’s a few days before Extravaganza, UCSB’s annual day-long concert, so they’re talking about that. In years past, Extravaganza offered a balanced bill of known acts and student bands, but this year, on a lineup that included notables like the Walkmen and Busta Rhymes, Hairbrain Scheme was the sole representative of Isla Vista’s music scene. It was a privilege they earned in a battle of the bands.

[[[ (4-1-1) Hairbrain Scheme plays this Sunday, July 3, at Menehune’s in Isla Vista for a Fourth of July-themed affair. ]]]

“It must have been such a punch in the face to the other bands when we won,” says Nava. Prior to the battle, he explains, the group dressed up as Confederate and Union soldiers and personally served treaties of surrender to their competition, giving each band the chance to bow out gracefully, ego intact. “We just put our name on the Potsdam Treaty and changed a few words,” says Nava. “We’d dip the treaties in coffee, burn the edges, really make them look period.”

[[[ THE SCHEME IS HATCHED ]]]

Isla Vista’s music scene is, for the most part, an assortment of various metal, punk, and reggae groups. But Hairbrain Scheme stands out pretty severely. Its sound defies easy categorization, sometimes coming across like children’s music on heavy uppers and sometimes like a strange bastardization of punk. It eschews the use of guitars, relying instead on keyboards. Harris, in addition to being a skilled bassist, is a professionally trained bassoon player, and the band has begun to incorporate that instrument into its music. The band’s songs are about sitcoms, the “terrible bourgeois,” marmalade,

revolution, and how appearances aren’t important, and Scheme’s live shows lay on the performance-art elements thick.

The story of Hairbrain Scheme is the story of Isla Vista’s two weirdest bands merging to form one larger, weirder band. The first component was Stereoklang, a three-piece that consisted of Harris, Nava, and a drummer named Troy, whom Nava describes as being depressed all the time and into the drumming style of “doom metal.” The group mostly performed original material, but was best known for its cover of “I Want to Be a Hulkamaniac,” pro-wrestler Hulk Hogan’s 1995 rap single.

Hairbrain’s other predecessor was Spread Eagle Surprise, a Parsons creation. Parsons first appeared to I.V. audiences as the lead singer of One Nation Under Rod, the world’s premier Rod Stewart cover band. When that failed to take off for obvious reasons, Spread Eagle Surprise was formed. The name refers to the fact that, when on stage, the group would dress in a combination of men’s and women’s clothing. “I wanted to create Isla Vista’s first genderly ambiguous band,” Parsons explains.

When Nava met Parsons after a Stereoklang show last year, the two hit it off and

began writing songs together. Spread Eagle Surprise and Stereoklang broke up a few months later, because, they explain, the Spread Eagle Surprise guitarist was a megalomaniac and Troy the depressed drummer, according to Nava, “lost that colorful aspect.” Nava and Parsons soon recruited Harris and Hairbrain Scheme was conceived. Percussion duties have switched hands a few times, and are currently handled by Dan Bellinger — a former *Independent* staffer — who also drums for S.B.’s metal band Vein Glory.

[[[ TAKE COVER ]]]

Conversation pauses as all stop to watch Elvis on the television, where he is water-skiing and flirting with a blonde at the same time. After Elvis is finished, talk resumes and it turns to the future of Hairbrain. “This year was only the beginning,” asserts Nava. After Extravaganza came Reel Loud, UCSB’s annual film festival, where the band opened and closed the event with a few songs. This was its last show before the slowed-down summer season, during which it’ll be touring California and possibly some of the East Coast. But the band eagerly awaits next September, when it returns to Isla Vista.

“We’re taking it into maximum overdrive next year,” says Harris. “Our songs are going to take on lives of their own and attack people. No one will be safe.” ■