

SUMMER ARTS

# Sounds of Summer

OUR CRITICS RECOMMEND TEN LOCAL MUSIC ACTS WORTH SWEATING FOR.

BY NATE SELTENRICH,  
RACHEL SWAN,  
AND KATHLEEN RICHARDS

## BAT MAKUMBA

Summer festivals are awash with what we call world music: anything from somewhere else, really. But rarely is that somewhere else Brazil, except within the broader context of Latin dance. So San Francisco group Bat Makumba, which doesn't play samba or bossa nova but a contemporary Brazilian hybrid infused with both rock and punk, may sound doubly unfamiliar. Propulsive basslines, diverse percussion, and uplifting rhythm guitar à la Afropop make Bat Makumba's music exciting because it's different, not simply because it's foreign. [MySpace.com/batmakumbamusic](http://MySpace.com/batmakumbamusic) (N.S.)

## ERK THA JERK

Just as the Atlanta-based producer Terius O'Neal (aka The-Dream) put his own amp on some of the biggest R&B hits of the past couple years (including Rihanna's "Umbrella" and Beyoncé's "Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)"), local producer Erk Tha Jerk has had a hand in most of the better-quality hip-hop tracks to come out of the Bay Area. He's cultivated his own style, combining minimalist snare and high hat with snappy electronic effects, and cleverly placed samples. Last year Erk also introduced himself to the world as a rapper — he'd apparently been rapping for several years, unnoticed — and created a cult of personality with his woozy cadence and snarly rics. His song "I'm So Dumb" takes a swipe at the hip-hop movement, while "Don't Need 'Em"



Kowloon Walled City.

Shannon Carr

assails all those enterprising young women who've become such an important fixture in hip-hop. This year's hits include the tweaky "Plane in the Air" and acerbic "I'm a Jerk" free-style — an obvious jab at the inferior Los Angeles group New Boyz. We're still waiting on the solo album, but it'll come any day now. [MySpace.com/erkthajerk](http://MySpace.com/erkthajerk) (R.S.)

## JAZZ SAWYER

San Francisco-born drummer Jaz Sawyer — who was apparently named for the now-defunct local radio station KJAZ — only recently moved back to the Bay Area after a long sojourn in New York, and within days of arrival was already making an imprint on the local scene. Sawyer is a real jazz drummer: He's sensitive, he accentuates in creative ways, he's a good listener, and he knows how to swing. He's conservatory trained, with an art-school sensibility and a knack for dabbling in many different genres (including Latin, classical, and Afro-Cuban). But technical skill and musicianship are only part of his appeal. Over the years, Sawyer has amassed an impressive discography as a composer and arranger, led several of his own bands, and anchored rhythm sections for a lot of jazz royalty (Abbey Lincoln, Bobby Hutcherson, Wynton Marsalis). Sawyer currently performs with San Francisco band 8 Legged Monster and runs his own label, Pursuance Records, which has a fascinating approach to music — its roster of artists draws from all parts of the jazz and blues diaspora, from straight-ahead to hip-hop. Sawyer performs around town several nights a week, but it's best to catch him leading

his own bands. [MySpace.com/PursuanceRecords](http://MySpace.com/PursuanceRecords) (R.S.)

## KOWLOON WALLED CITY

It only took a three-song demo to get the online metal community gushing about Kowloon Walled City, and a couple more songs on its 2008 *Turk Street* EP to get the likes of *Guitar World*, *Thrasher Magazine*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle* to follow suit, and for Noise Pop to handpick them as the only heavy Bay Area band to play this year's festival. Yes, they're that good. Channeling the theme of urban decay, Kowloon Walled City (named after the Chinese enclave in British Hong Kong that became known for its squalid, anarchic conditions) balances mid-tempo, two-note sludge awesomeness with heady hardcore influences like Unsane and Cavity. Scott Evans' vocal-chord-ripped screaming nicely complements the drop-tuned guitar and fuzz-bass concrete wall, but the band's sound isn't so harsh or dirty as to confine them to a crusty scene. Expect a debut full-length later this summer, and world domination shortly thereafter. [MySpace.com/kowloonwalledcity](http://MySpace.com/kowloonwalledcity) (K.R.)

## LEGALLY BLYND

Launched as a brotherly enterprise by two of the most prolific behind-the-scenes men in popular R&B, Legally Blynd began generating a cult of adoration when it put out its first album in 2007. Void of filler, the self-titled record veered from gospel-rock to country and blues ballads like "Sunshine in Your Eyes," in

which vocalists John "Jubu" Smith and BJ Kemp use some masterful harmonies to shore up the passion in a love affair gone stale. Berkeley High alum Jubu is the band's main architect, songwriter, and personality, but he's managed to put together a rotating cast of A-list musicians that usually includes organist Carl Wheeler, trombonist Marty Weiner, guitarist Errol Cooney, and his brother Eric "Pikfunk" Smith anchoring the band on electric bass. In the past year Legally Blynd performed two concerts at Yoshi's, seducing audiences with some wonderful new material — including an unadorned solo guitar ballad that shows Jubu's gift for expressing sentiments through song. Expect more shows and another full album by year's end. [MySpace.com/legallyblynd](http://MySpace.com/legallyblynd) (R.S.)

## MESSENGER SELAH

It's only natural that reggae, born of Jamaica's tropical climate, finds itself at home when the sun is shining. But good vibes travel only so far. This is something Jamaica-born, San Leandro-based Messenger Selah seems to embrace midway through his second album, *Breaking Babylon Curse*, which progresses from a groove-laden and professional but ultimately unextraordinary first half to a socially conscious second half that delivers uplifting messages in refreshingly nonchic language with the aid of dancehall, dub, and even rock flavors. If there's a golden mean in modern roots reggae, this is it. [MySpace.com/selahmusic](http://MySpace.com/selahmusic) (N.S.)

## PAPERCUTS

It's not the most dynamic album — singer, songwriter, and primary musician Jason Quevers prefers to play in muted shades of blue and gray — but Papercuts' debut, *You Can Have What You Want*, firmly meets its own standards for hazy California psych-pop. And that'd be the end of it, if not for warmer temperatures on the horizon that will call for cool sounds like Quever's — intriguing, stylish music that doesn't need to shout. Like a Sixties garage band playing in fog, Papercuts hints at nuances obscured by understatement just as it breezes away any impulse to scrutinize. [MySpace.com/thepapercuts](http://MySpace.com/thepapercuts) (N.S.)

## SAMORA AND ELENA PINDERHUGHES

When you're a young lion in a city that's birthed a lot of big cats, you gotta milk it for all it's worth. Enter Samora Pinderhughes, the Berkeley High piano prodigy who started learning Venezuelan and Cuban percussion as a toddler and produced an incredible dossier (two albums, performances at the White House and Carnegie Hall, and a commission for the Caramoor Music Festival, among other things). At age seventeen, he already anchors rhythm sections throughout the Bay Area club scene — and gets called out by older bandleaders because his dad takes him home at midnight. And wait till you get a load of his younger sister: Thirteen-year-old vocalist and flautist Elena Pinderhughes formed the trio Catch 22 with her brother and dropped her album at age nine. She's already toured the country, headlined a show at Oakland Yoshi's, garnered *Down Beat's* 2008 award for best jazz soloist, and earned honorary membership in Berkeley High's Jazz Ensemble as an eighth grader.



essenjah Selah.