

# LIVE DATES

## THE SURFERS Wetlands September 19

The world's top surfers blew into Manhattan during the long break between the Kana Beach Lacanau Pro Grand Plage in France and the Kaiser Summer Surf at Barra da Tijuca in Rio to promote their new record, *Songs From the Pipe*, at Wetlands. If Deadheads still wear beads to a lot of shows and B-boys and girls still wear gold chains, it's disappointing that there isn't a single Puka-shelled Spicoll in the club when we arrive around nine, just a pack of sunburned duhrballs in baggies and Vans—a gaggle of whom had been leveling the eye on my guy, Lance (who from a certain angle, in a certain light, resembles Keanu in *Point Break*), during the train ride in from the beach, nodding like they knew he'd be here.

The Surfers appear to have buried themselves deep inside the green room. Lance suggests we set up outside in the line-up and wait for the set. A pit-crew roadie walks onstage to tune up, followed by another guy in a flower-power velour suit, azure ruffled tux shirt and Docs. "Holy shit," says Lance, "that's Rob Machado!" I'd been told that the second-best-known pro surfer in the world was as pure a style animal as there's ever been on the ASP WCT tour, and here's the proof. He looks like Richard Edson with an afro. The surf rats whistle and hoot as he dithers with his phase shifter.

Meanwhile another guy shuffles on. He's decked out in a boxy black suit and exudes the grave air of a serious musician preparing to jam. "That guy's a *kamikaze*," Lance tells me. "He's Born Again! He's that bullet-headed MTV Sports host you were so pumped about during Sand Blast." It takes only a second to recognize that, despite a similarly primitive brow and squid-lipped jaw, the guy before me is *not* MTV Sports stud Dan Cortese. Lance says he's Peter King, "a former Bud Pro tour dog and kind of a social coordinator for the pro surf scene. He's also got a rep as a pretty fair guitar player."

They're milling around onstage in the semi-darkness, just like any other scrub group playing audition night at CB's, when a little guy ambles out, crouches and starts tuning up an acoustic. "Whoa! Motherfucker," proclaims Lance. "That's Kelly Slater!"

Kelly Slater, coholder of the record for most ASP world titles (five), possibly en route to a sixth championship, is the guy whose mug is plastered all over town on those Quicksilver 109 Spring Street posters. It's such a bad picture, though (his nose isn't that big in real life), that most people fail to recognize him as former surf bunny Jimmy Slade of *Baywatch* and Pamela Anderson's current squeeze. Now, Pam only dates hot-looking men, and Kelly is no exception, but he's up there futzing around in a squared-off, short sleeve shirt, black cords and whatever kind of creepers they wear in his hometown of Cocoa Beach, blinking at the darkness. Pam really should have given the guy *Surfer* magazine calls "the Franchise" a few fashion tips before sending him off on tour.

With Slater, King and Machado onstage—along with the roadie, who turns out to be the ringer guitarist, a drummer, bass player and a keyboard-

steel guitar player (music-wise, the Surfers get a lot of help from professional studio musicians)—Machado begins to strum his Les Paul vacuously with his chin in the air, like a man staking out the breaks from a hottub on the deck of a three-level redwood pole house on the North Shore of Oahu.

"His current ranking outside the top 10," muses Lance, "doesn't really do justice to the fluidity he brings to the sport. Machado probably wouldn't surf competitively at all if he weren't such a monster."

He's focused, sensitive, playing it cool—this is clearly his first time. King makes a bit more of a show of attacking his aqua Fender Jaguar, though he doesn't move much either, as the band vamps a bit of a jangly instrumental intro. King plays the alpha-male for about 10 seconds until Slater takes center stage and grabs the mic. "Fuckin' ay, right!" shouts Lance, leveling a shakka at the Big Kahuna. Kelly's got a serviceable, pleasant voice. It's not very distinctive, but his pitch and timbre are good, and he controls his volume nearly as well as he holds a tight rail going backside at Pipe. Sure, he's a bit stiff, but one gets the sense that it's because, like Machado, he's a rock virgin.

"That was the first song of ours ever played in New York," Slater confides when it's over. The girls and gremmies who sprawl across the monitors for photos are enraptured. Peter King takes a vocal turn, making a crack about saving Kelly's voice. He may be the best musician in the bunch, but King, with his MTV connections, is also an attention-mongering fool. Still, he keeps the ball rolling while Slater regards the audience with tight-lipped head-bops, plays with his water bottle and joins Machado in looking at nothing.

Slater invites two enthusiastically buoyant boppers up to dance with the band. These are big womanly girls of the Picabo Street variety who are most commonly found in the Wetlands' aromatic Eco-Saloon twirling to "Truckin'." After verifying that Pam is not in the house and Slater is for all intents and purposes available, the two babes bound up on stage to do a tentative frug. An unbidden blonde jumps up and engages Slater in the Mashed Potato, which prompts King to goof on Slater with a taunt about "Jim Morrison."

Someone calls King an asshole. The girls voluntarily disembark the stage and the band barrels through a Machado solo (prompting a rush to the bar where—as in the men's room—every transaction is preceded by the distinctive rip of Velcro), and two or three sensitive ballads featuring Slater on guitar before ending in a long psychedelic number called, "Anything From You."

With an Eno instrumental passage here, some Ennio Morricone noodling there, and a floating sea anemone texture throughout, the Surfers seem to have successfully bottom-turned out of any Wallflowers mush producer T-Bone Burnett might have mired them in. They're not the most innovative group to come down the coast—I believe the ukulele is an instrument whose revival is long overdue and that this is just the band to spearhead it—but Lance sees it differently. "I've seen worse bands play the Garden," he says "Plus, Slater and Machado can rip! How many other rock bands can pull into town and get a barrel on the outside section of a 15-foot wave before soundcheck?"

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