

the Belairs
the origins of surf music

Their hit record: "Mr. Moto" (Arvee Records, 1962)—the earliest recording to be tagged at the time as "surf music." **Their sound:** *The link between the rock-instrumental heroes of the late '50s (Duane Eddy, Link Wray, Fireballs, Johnny and the Hurricanes...) and the surf bands of the early '60s (Chantays, Surfaris, Beach Boys...).* **Their role:** *Pioneers (alongside Dick Dale) of a major regional music phenomenon, creator of many classic tunes for the genre, inspiration for countless later bands and progenitor of others (members went on to found the Challengers, Eddie and the Showmen, and the Standells).* **Their story:** *Fully told here, in word and sound!*



"Wow man—your music sounds just like it feels out on a wave! It's like... 'surf' music, man!"

This comment, made by a Redondo Beach surfer to the Belairs in the summer of '61, may well be the earliest documentation as to how surf music really began. Accordingly, *this* is the album that reveals the truth behind the California myth.

"This was the start of what became known as the California surfin' sound. Had some of the media attention focused on the Belairs in the beginning like it did on Dick Dale... they might have been recognized as the kings of surf music."

—Bob Dalley (author, *Surfin' Guitars—Instrumental Bands of the '60s*)

"What (Dick Dale's) Deltones were to Orange County, the Belairs were to the (Los Angeles area) South Bay—both in popularity and influence... they spawned an entire family tree of important surf bands."

—Dan Forte (*Guitar Player* magazine)

To hear this chronology of the Belairs' music (from their early home tapings to the seminal hit "Mr. Moto" and on through their final studio tracks) and to read their colorful story (as it is told here by founding member Paul Johnson) is to discover the true origins of authentic all-instrumental surf music—the "original soundtrack" for the California youth revolution of the early '60s!

- early home recordings: 1. The Crawler 2. Stung 3. Peter Gunn 4. It Was I 5. Mr. Moto
- the "Liberty" session: 6. Mr. Moto 7. Little Brown Jug 8. The Three Blind Mice Make It To Santa's Village 9. Vampire 10. Kamikaze • the 45 demo: 11. Volcanic Action 12. Runaway
- other studio recordings: 13. Bedlam 14. Volcanic Action (from "Pickwick Park" TV show) 15. Rockin' Pants (with the Initials) 16. Giggling Girl (with the Initials) • the warehouse session: 17. Squirt
- later home recordings: 18. On Top Of Old Smokey 19. (Un Clasé de) Chiflado 20. Davy Crockett Meets Mickey Mouse 21. Volcanic Action 22. Rampage 23. Flip Top Box 24. The Wayward Wind
- the "Gold Star" session: 25. (Un Clasé de) Chiflado 26. Duck Waddle 27. Squad Car 28. The Shimmy

TRACKS	WHERE RECORDED	DATE
1-3	Paul's bedroom, Rolling Hills	early '60
4,5	Paul's living room, Redondo Beach	Dec. 29, '60
6-10	Liberty Recorders, Hollywood	March 31, '61
11	somewhere in Hollywood (unknown)	early '62?
12-14	Liberty Recorders, Hollywood	March 27, '62
15,16	somewhere in Hollywood (unknown)	early '62?
17	Arvee Warehouse, Hollywood	March 6, '62
18-22	Paul's living room, Redondo Beach	mid-late '62
23,24	Ed's garage, Rolling Hills	mid-late '62
25-28	Goldstar Recorders, Hollywood	mid '63

PLAYER	INSTRUMENT	TRACKS
Ed Bertrand	lead guitar (to early '63)	1-24
Paul Johnson	rhythm guitar	ALL
Chaz Stuart	sax	5-28
Richard Delvy	drums (to mid-'62)	6-17
Jim Roberts	piano	6, 8-10,12,13,17
Dickie Dodd	drums (mid-'62-early '63)	18-24
Art Fisher	lead guitar (early '63-end)	25-28
Steve Lotto	bass (early '63-end)	25-28
George Dumas	drums (early '63-end)	25-28

Restored and remastered in 2007 by Greg Russo
at Caldwell Studios, West Caldwell, NJ

"The Belairs were one of the first surf groups I ever heard; they had a profound effect on me starting a band and playing surf music. Some real pioneers!"
—Jim Fuller—the *Surfaris* ("Wipeout")

"Mr. Moto' is one of my all-time favorite instrumentals! Its catchy riffs were inspirational to my early playing. The rest is history..."
—Bob Spickard—the *Chantays* ("Pipeline")

"Mr. Moto' by the Belairs—what a great tune! It was one of the first songs learned by the Tornados and played at our dances. Come to think of it, it is still one of our favorite tunes, and the band plays it often."
—Gerald Sanders—the *Tornados* ("Bustin' Surfboards")

CD front cover photo: the Belairs in mid-'62. l-r: Chaz Stuart, Jim Roberts, Richard Delvy, Ed Bertrand, Paul Johnson
the rear cover photo (above) was taken at a rehearsal just prior to the March 31, '61 session (when the hit version of "Mr. Moto" was recorded)

THE BELAIRS *and the Origins of Surf Music*

a personal account by founding member PAUL JOHNSON (*revised 12/07*)

• **And then there was surf music! (how it all began)**

In southern California in the early '60s, some way-cool surfer/musician dudes thought it would be really boss to invent some sounds to go along with surfing; so they figured out how to do it, and then all the cool surfer kids just had one big party on the beach that lasted for several years. It was gnarly, man!... The Beach Boys were there every day they weren't busy recording more hits; so were Jan & Dean and the Surfaris. Frankie & Annette were there too—twisting on the sand as Dick Dale played on and on and on...

...Wrong!!

The bad news (for those who cherish the “California myth”) is that this *ain't* the way it happened; but the good news is that the way it *really* happened was better. *Much* better!

As one who was there in the eye of the storm through the whole incredible experience, I get bugged with the pop-media's cornball caricature of what was, in reality, one of America's genuine regional folk-movements. Authentic all-instrumental surf music was just as soulful and meaningful to those who were there as Motown was for Detroit or reggae for Jamaica. And it was a vital link between the early rock 'n roll heyday (Elvis, Little Richard, Chuck Berry...) and the later one (Dylan, the Beatles...) during a time that was otherwise pretty bland.

• **How it *really* began**

As the '50s came to an end, no one in southern California had a clue as to what was about to happen. The beach was a nice place to go for some sun and a swim, but kids would rather cruise the boulevards that stretched out in all directions over L.A. They hung out at the ice cream and root beer stands, and they danced at sock hops to 45-RPM records; live music was a rarity. Doo-wop and rockabilly were still the epitome of “cool,” and the *ho-dad* (the “Fonzie”-type) was the reigning cultural hero.

Surfing was for the few rugged collegiate-types who were strong enough to haul the massive boards of that day down to the water. And as the beaches were the turf of the “beatniks,” it also had a bohemian connotation; accordingly, modern jazz and bongo drums fit the surfing image of that day better than electric guitars.

But subtle changes were afoot that would soon alter the entire picture overnight: lightweight foam surfboards were introduced, making the sport more accessible to the masses; the new transistor radio allowed kids to gather on the beaches rather than the boulevards (without having to leave their essential music behind); and the 1959 film “Gidget” portrayed the vagabond life of the surfer as the very sort of romantic fantasy a teenager would love to escape to.

By the summer of '61, evidence of the new trend was all around: legions of kids now embraced the sport along with all the styles, mannerisms and slang that grew up around it. The new “surfers” had arrived! And purely by coincidence (not by design), an unrelated trend that had been growing on a different

front was fated to stumble into a chance alliance with the new surfers: a few young musicians in the area were busy emulating the sounds of their heroes—Duane Eddy, Link Wray, the Fireballs, Johnny & the Hurricanes, etc.—and forming bands of their own based on these dynamic *all-instrumental* stylings.

The “fated moment” was the fabulous summer of ‘61, when these trends came forth simultaneously onto the popular scene. It was then that my band, the Belairs, having just cut our record, “Mr. Moto,” set out to gain a following. We were just kids (not a bunch of seasoned surfers) but we did hang out at L.A.’s south bay beaches; so it was only natural that as we began throwing dances that summer, it was the local surfers who comprised the bulk of our audience.

What happened that summer was a bona fide cultural explosion; we threw five dances, and each successive one doubled in attendance, forcing us to resort to larger and larger halls. Our first dance drew about 200, and our last one brought in over 1500 of the new surfers, who by then were identified by long sunbleached hair, brown bodies and huarachi sandals (which they used to stomp on the hardwood floor, thus creating the dance that became their tribal ritual).

Dick Dale & the Deltones were holding similar court about 30 miles south at the Rendezvous Ballroom in Balboa. Suddenly that summer the thing exploded; and now, in addition to having a look and a style of their own, the surfers had a *music* of their own!

So who deserves the credit for “inventing” surf music? Obviously, it could not have occurred without the musicians; but *the real credit should go to the surfers themselves*. For contrary to the popular myth, no musician could have planned this; it was a classic *accident* of history—a chance alliance, due largely to the affection the surfers held for the music. A prominent local said to me at one of our first dances, “Wow, man—your music sounds just like it feels out on a wave! It’s like... ‘surf’ music, man!” Another said, “You guys oughta make a record and call it the ‘Surfer Stomp!’” These comments took me aback, as I had never made any such association in my mind.

(Nor had any other musician, to my knowledge. Upon making my own pilgrimage to see Dick Dale that summer, I was dazzled by his sheer power and virtuosity; but I recall no hint of pandering to the “surf” image—he just played tough, solid R&B-tinged tunes, mostly instrumentals, that validated themselves without *any* self-conscious reference to surfing.)

This uncontrived, serendipitous merging of trends testifies that surf music was one of those rare and marvelous phenomena that comes in like the wind and sweeps everyone along for the ride. It retained this air of carefree innocence and remained virtually free of pretense well into ‘62 (by which time Dale’s “Let’s Go Trippin’” and our “Mr. Moto” had hit the local charts).

The bare beginnings of exploitation came in from the outside, when someone *did* make a record called “Surfer Stomp” (with studio musicians who had nothing to do with the movement). The Beach Boys’ “Surfin’” was met with puzzlement and even scorn around the beaches; I recall overhearing some locals threatening to go *beat up* the Beach Boys for candy-coating (so they felt) the image of the sport. And when the *Beach Party* movies came along, surfers would go to the theater and howl with derisive laughter at the ridiculous caricature of themselves that they saw up on the screen!

But apart from and despite all of this, *true* surf music continued to evolve in '62. When Leo Fender introduced the *reverb* unit for guitars, many bands quickly embraced the wet, hollow tone that became synonymous with surf music. (Note again how a pure accident of timing and technology figured into defining the genre's identity.) With the Tornados' "Bustin' Surfboards," bands began to acknowledge their adoption by the surf culture by using surf themes in their tunes. Note however that surf's biggest hits, "Pipeline" and "Wipe Out" (both in '63), originally bore non-surf titles.¹ At first, bands didn't seek a surf image; in fact, very few "surf" musicians surfed! They simply played along with the game, and this gave their music a larger identity and thus a greater significance than it might have otherwise had.

To fully appreciate what *really* happened during those dizzying days, one must look past the media hype; something very real was going on around southern California's beaches—something that rallied the spirit of a generation and gave it an identity and a musical expression of its own. This album offers a unique perspective on this, because *the story of the Belairs is the story of this phenomenon in microcosm*. To learn the colorful history of the band and to hear the evolution of our sound on these tracks, from our 1960 home-recordings through our final studio tapings (made just before the British Invasion wiped out the movement) is to discover the fascinating truth behind the popular myth of surf music.

• Meet the original Belairs:

I was a freshman in high school in early 1960 when I met **Eddie Bertrand** on the schoolbus. We were both fledgling guitarists with the same above-mentioned musical heroes, and our love of the guitar became a shared adventure in which we spent every available hour playing together and forging our own brand of instro music. The hallmark of our emerging style was a clever interplay between lead and rhythm guitars that we picked up from the Fireballs, along with the kind of bold melodic phrasing that we derived from our idol, Duane Eddy. (Our first tune was Eddy's "Rebel Rouser.") When the Ventures exploded onto the scene in mid-'60 with "Walk, Don't Run," we knew we were in sync with the vanguard of an exciting trend (as the early home recordings on the CD will show...)

Mind you, at this time there was no live music scene like there is today, with kids on every block forming bands and performing. We were in virgin territory; we knew of *no* other kids in our area who were doing this. Yet with visions of fame before us, we set out to find other players with whom we could make our dream a reality.

We recruited **Richard Delvy**, drummer with the Narbonne high school swing-dance band. He had never played rock 'n roll, but he put a beat behind our music and that thrilled us to no end! He then brought in **Chaz Stuart**, a clarinetist from the dance band, who was willing to learn to play sax to be in the band. And we enlisted **Jimmy Roberts**, also from the dance band, to play piano with us part-time (for special occasions and recording sessions).

We couldn't find a bass player (we were too naive to know we were supposed to have one) so we proceeded without one. The Belairs (named after Chaz's '55 Chevy) were off and running! Who could have known that within a year we would be leaders in a youth-culture revolution!?

¹ "Pipeline" was originally titled "Magnum 45" and "Wipe Out" was "Stiletto."

- **The tunes tell the story**

As I suggested earlier, the Belairs' story is a history of surf music in microcosm. Accordingly, the various chapters of that story are revealed in the various groups of recordings in this album:

The *early home recordings* tell, with disarming honesty, about how Eddie and I developed the sound that would soon spawn an entire "school" of surf music! We had only been playing for a few months at this point (in 1960), but our unique style was already emerging.

Our creative process was highly collaborative. In tunes such as "**It Was I**" and "**Mr. Moto**" (brand new at the time of this crude home taping), I would develop the parts and teach the leads to Eddie. With "**Stung**" and "**Peter Gunn**," Eddie brought the leads and I explored ideas for rhythm parts. "**The Crawler**" came about one day when I was fooling around with the chords from Little Anthony's "Shimmy Shimmy Ko Ko Bop" and Eddie chimed in with this melody.

Through this process, we developed an easy blend that came from conforming to each other's style; we treated the guitar as a *duo* rather than a solo instrument. We sought to draw each other's qualities out by *complimenting* rather than competing with one another. We tried trading off, but it clicked best with Ed in the lead-guitar role; this was fine with me, as I felt that a strong *rhythm* guitar should be part of our motif. The boldness of my style arose from the initial need to cover for the lack of bass and drums; ironically, as the band gained notoriety this came to be regarded as classic *surf* style rhythm playing!

The *Liberty session* recordings include the hit version of "**Mr. Moto**." In the spring of '61 we pooled our allowances and rented a couple of hours at Liberty Records' studio in Hollywood. Thrilled with the results, full of youthful zeal and armed with a demo that included these five recordings, we set out to land a contract! After a number of adventures, we secured a deal with Arvee Records (whose A&R man was a young Sonny Bono) to put out a 45 with "Moto" on one side and "**Little Brown Jug**" on the other. (Much later, Richard Delvy would release "**Kamikaze**" b/w "**Vampire**" on his own Triumph record label, hoping to fill the void left by the lack of an Arvee follow-up to "Moto.")

Arvee did little to promote us. "Mr. Moto" was officially out through that whole summer of '61 (when we were gathering our following) and through autumn as well, yet with no airplay. It was only by our own deliberate plot to hype the radio stations (abetted by our fans) that the record began to be aired in early '62. DJ Sam Riddle was the first to play it (on his "Topic Youth" show every weeknight on KRLA) and it soon caught fire; before long, I was hearing it on the radio every morning as I got ready for school!

We reveled in this and all that came with it (legions of fans, high-profile gigs, TV shows, schmoozing with celebs, etc.). We also found ourselves doing session work—playing on other records such as "**Rockin' Pants**" by the Initials (a Coasters-style novelty vocal group we met at one of our shows).

The summer of '62 saw surf music come into flower and the Belairs blossomed with it. Our success also led to the creation of our own teen night club, the *Belair Club*, which quickly became the focal point of the exploding surf music scene in L.A.'s south bay. Every Friday and Saturday night we played for hundreds of kids who came from miles around to hear us and to be a part of the new phenomenon. Dick Dale still owned Orange County; but the Belairs ruled the beach towns of L.A.!

After “Mr. Moto,” however, lack of record company support and growing differences within the band undermined our efforts to come up with a winning follow-up to our hit, which exacerbated a growing identity crisis within the Belairs. Here again, we were working through issues that were emblematic of what the larger movement was going through; accordingly, to understand the dynamics within the Belairs at this point is to gain insight into forces that were at work in the greater arena, fine-tuning the very definition of this new thing called *surf music*:

I mentioned that the Belairs were rooted in an amalgam of the *guitar ensemble* model we saw in the Fireballs (and later the Ventures) and the bold *solo guitar* model of Duane Eddy. At first, we were able to combine these influences effectively into “our own style” (which is well represented in the sound of “Mr. Moto”). However, just as we were about to make our second record, the new Fender reverb was being adopted by many of the new “surf” bands. Eddie was eager to turn the reverb up and move further in the direction of the bold “solo guitar” model, while I favored a more subtle incorporation of the reverb into a refinement of the “ensemble” model that had distinguished our sound up to then. I resisted the idea of coming out with a follow-up record that would sacrifice this distinction; I wanted to build on the unique sound we began with, and find something that would sound like *the Belairs*, rather than like “every other surf band.” After all, many of these bands were, in fact, protégés of the Belairs; were we going to continue to be their leader, or were we now going to become their follower?

In hindsight, it’s clear this wasn’t about who was right or wrong; it was about two guys in pursuit of their own musical ideals—both equally valid but increasingly difficult to reconcile within one band. Eddie later went on to prove with his own band (as will be discussed below) that he could continue to succeed in the world of surf music by doing *his* thing, and I was similarly vindicated in doing mine. For awhile, our attempt to make it work *together* did result in some of our best music; but this wasn’t enough to sustain us once we were past the point of opportunity to ride the coattails of “Mr. Moto.”

That slipped away while we struggled in vain to record “**Volcanic Action**,” Eddie’s full-reverb surf jam, in a way that would make it an effective follow-up single that satisfied everyone’s concerns. Our first attempt (track 11 here) was recorded *dry* in the studio, with the intention that reverb would be added later. (The when and where of this session remains a mystery.) A demo 45 of this was pressed (b/w “**Runaway**”) but somehow the reverb never made it into the mix (to the band’s dissatisfaction) and the record was not released. More about this below...

We had another session at Arvee’s warehouse, with awful acoustic conditions. How bad was it? Chaz’s sax solo in “**Squirt**” is a half-beat *late* throughout, as he was playing to the echo bouncing off the wall in that cavernous room—he couldn’t tell the difference amid the din! The warehouse version of “Volcanic Action” was so drenched in room reverb that it was at the other extreme from the “dry” version on the 45. (Demos of this and other tunes from this session were lost over the years; only “Squirt” survived.)

There was a final (much better) session at Liberty Records’ studio on March 27, 1962, just as “Moto” was at the end of its run and dropping off the charts. Fourteen of the tracks from this session are on Sundazed Records’ CD entitled *Volcanic Action* which I recommend to you as “the rest of the story” about the Belairs. (Between that CD and this one, you’ll have *everything* available by the band.)

Three recordings from that session are included here (tracks 12-14):

“Runaway” was the B-side of the aforementioned “Volcanic Action” 45. And our edited version of “Bedlam” appears here courtesy of Sundazed Records. (The *Volcanic Action* CD has the full-length version, which goes on for nearly *five minutes* as I had just written the tune and hadn’t yet finessed a final arrangement for it; this remix was done to approximate what it *might* have sounded like had I done so...)

Our *third* track from that session found its way onto this album in a very roundabout way, and the story behind this goes to the heart of the relationship between The Belairs and Arvee Records:

In early ‘62, Arvee booked us onto Bob Eubanks’ “Pickwick Park” TV dance party show to promote what they intended as our “new release” (the *dry* version of “Volcanic Action” on the promo disc described above) despite the fact that we did *not* want this version of the tune to be our next single. So we refused to go on the show unless they substituted the version from the March 27 session. They went along with this and made a one-off test pressing for this purpose. This is why it is the *March 27* version of “Volcanic Action” that you hear on track 14 (from the TV show) rather the one from Arvee’s 45.

Now, there’s a twist to this story: when *this* album was first assembled (1993), *no one even remembered that there ever was* a March 27, ‘62 session, let alone that original studio tapes from that session might exist; only several years later would Sundazed Records *rediscover* these “lost” recordings (to our great surprise!) when they bought out a collection of old tapes that had been gathering dust over the years in a closet at Liberty studio.²

And the only reason we have the clip of that recording on *this* album is because *my mother home-recorded the Pickwick Park Dance Party Show off the TV that night!*

The hassle over “Volcanic Action” soured the band’s relationship with the label, who then nixed *any* subsequent Belairs releases. So in the end, “Mr. Moto” was the only official Belairs’ release by Arvee.³

Immediately after this, drummer Richard Delvy left the band and Dickie Dodd took his place. (These and other personnel changes will be discussed in more detail below.) We settled into a golden season of playing at the peak of our form at the Bel Air Club, still basking in the afterglow of “Mr. Moto’s” success. Dodd was a catalyst to refresh our creativity, as the *later home recordings* will show:

“**Chiflado**” was probably the most popular Belairs’ original as a “live” number at our shows—many other local bands had their own version of it, despite the fact that it was never out on a record. This version of “**Volcanic Action**” is the closest of the three on this album to how it was *supposed* to sound. Regarding the “drum solo” aspect of “**Rampage**”—note that this recording was made well before the release of “Wipeout” by the Surfaris—it was not derived from that tune. And the other four tracks in this group illustrate our penchant for creating our own arrangements for familiar tunes from widely varied sources. I feel that all these tracks reflect a good measure of success in our efforts to blend Eddie’s bold reverb sound with my tight ensemble arrangements.

² The liner notes on earlier releases of this album are full of speculation as to where and when the recordings you hear on tracks 11, 12 and 14 were made. We now know that tracks 12 and 14 were part of the “lost” March 27 session; track 11 is the only remaining mystery...

³ A handful of “Volcanic” b/w “Runaway” demos are out there somewhere and worth big bucks as collector’s items.

Nevertheless, the wheels were already in motion to take us to our separate destinies. Shortly after these recordings were made, Eddie left (taking Dickie with him) to form his own band.

As the final tracks on this album demonstrate, the “second generation” Belairs (the unit Chaz & I pulled together after Ed & Dick’s departure) returned to the R&B roots of instrumental rock. **Art Fisher** (the fine guitarist who replaced Eddie) had played with the Journeymen—a great local R&B instro band that also pre-dated surf music. We also recruited rock-solid drummer **George Dumas** from the Journeymen; *and* we finally added a bass player—**Steve Lotto**, a veteran of the East Coast music scene.

This band continued to pack them in at the Club every weekend through late ‘63. At the height of a fresh and creative initial period, we recorded these four tunes at Goldstar Studio in Hollywood. But when nothing came of this, and as it became clear that we were not likely to duplicate the early success of the band, our spark began to wane; the “club gig” became routine, the music lost its edge and I finally left to pursue life after the Belairs. Chaz kept the band going for awhile longer, but the glory days were over; with the British onslaught of ‘64, the Belairs (along with every other surf band) finally threw in the towel.

• **The Belairs’ claims to fame**

Frankly, it amazes and humbles me to note the high esteem the Belairs have found among today’s surf music fans; after all, we had only one regional hit. Still, though it had none of the national acclaim that attended such biggies as “Wipeout” or “Pipeline,” “Mr. Moto” is often listed today alongside these illustrious hits as one of the essential “surf classics” (all the more ironic as we had no idea when we recorded it that it would ever be tagged as *surf* music).

Upon reflection, I see a number of things about the band that might explain why it is held in such regard; at the risk of seeming to toot my own horn, I will boil these down to what I see as *three* defining qualities of the Belairs that point to our distinction:

1) We were in at the beginning. Music historians consistently cite the Belairs and Dick Dale’s Deltones as the bands that birthed surf music out of the larger rock-instrumental genre, and many point to “Mr. Moto” as the first true “surf” record.

God forbid I should take anything away from Dick Dale! “Trippin’” hit at virtually the same time as “Moto,” and it certainly has equal if not greater claim to the title,⁴ considering Dale’s impact and well-earned reputation as “king of the surf guitar.” But as I said: the phenomenon began simultaneously in *two* locales, with Dale in Balboa and the Belairs in Redondo Beach; from these founts came the two principal schools of surf music that grew up together after that. I’m quite content to be regarded as a *co*-founder of surf music along with Dale!

I think the nature of *our* claim is best understood in light of our role as the first *teen rock-instrumental combo* to be heralded by the surfers as champions of *their* music. Dale was older, more sophisticated, more the *virtuoso* in his styling; his singular claim to the throne as “king” is along different lines, and is

⁴ Here’s how I resolve this: “Trippin’” hit the charts a bit earlier than “Moto,” and so it’s accurate to say that it is the “*first record* then being tagged as ‘surf music’ to chart.” But as “Moto” was actually recorded some months earlier than “Trippin’,” it’s *also* accurate to say that it was the “*earliest recording* then being tagged as ‘surf music’ to chart.” So—*both* have a valid claim as *first!*

uncontested. But we *were* one of the two original models for other youth bands to follow, and “Mr. Moto” did become an archetype of the emerging form.

As subsequent history shows, Orange County surf bands tended to follow Dale’s model (favoring a dominant lead guitar with heavy reverb) while South Bay & L.A. bands showed more influence from the Belairs (ensemble playing and moderate reverb); a mixture of these influences can be discerned in the music of all the other bands that grew up under the tutelage of the Deltones and the Belairs.

2) We were a group comprised of natural-born leaders. Bands usually form around the dominant influence of a singular person of conspicuous talent and vision. Dick Dale is a case in point. The Belairs, however, were “all chiefs and no Indians;” each of us was a born leader with his own strong, definite ideas for the band.

This would have torn us apart early on had we not found a way to harmonize our disparate gifts. We made it work by letting every man excel in his own area of strength; each member found a niche within the band where he could operate as undisputed leader:

I was the *musical director*. (My forté was arranging, composing original tunes, and coming up with musical ideas, so I led rehearsals and developed our repertoire.) Ed was *lead guitarist and front man* (owing to his natural stage presence and very engaging personality). Richard was our *business manager*. (He was older and shrewder, with a knack for wheeling and dealing.) Jimmy was our *musical mentor* (as he was the most skilled player and musical theoretician). And Chaz was our *resident sage*—the voice of reason who resolved things when the rest of us reached impasse. (He was a hip-talking beatnik-type and a reservoir of off-the-wall wisdom.)

We innately understood the value of each other’s gifts, and we were fortunate in that these gifts happened to compliment (rather than conflict with) one another; thus we were able to harness our varied talents together and work efficiently as a team.

I cite this as one of our prime distinctives for three reasons:

First, it simply made us a *very* good band, and the fruit of this was some very good music! Second, by modeling these leadership qualities within our sphere of influence, we set an example that led many other bands to embrace us as *their* leader in the movement. And third, it is evidenced in the marks our various members made in that movement by their exploits after moving on from the Belairs. For while the harnessing of our abilities held us together in the short run, our strong personal urgings did eventually lead us to go our separate ways; and as the record shows, the Belairs’ legacy reads like a “who’s who” in the annals of surf music:

Richard Delvy was a natural entrepreneur; he was among the first to see the commercial potential in marketing production-line packages of surf music to the masses. After he left the band he moved to Hollywood, where he had made inroads into the world of music production, publishing and promotion. He formed the Challengers band and produced a string of hit LPs with them; he produced a number of other surf and hot-rod albums, *and* he secured the master and publishing rights to “Wipeout” by the Surfaris, which became the highest-charting surf record of all time.

Eddie's band, Eddie & the Showmen, became one of the premiere bands of the surf music era. He challenged Dick Dale on his home turf (Orange County) by establishing the Showmen as a popular draw there. (They were house band at Retail Clerks Hall in Anaheim, just up the street from Harmony Park Ballroom where Dale was then playing). He also made a number of classic records (including two compositions of mine, "Squad Car" and "Lanky Bones," and his own "Mr. Rebel").

As for me, I went on to front *my* own band, PJ & the Galaxies, wherein I moved to *lead* guitar (which fired my creative juices anew). This was a fertile time for me, as I now had a fresh new high-visibility showcase for my ideas. Also during this period, I played on quite a few surf and hot-rod albums that were produced by Gary Usher, Mike Curb, Richard Delvy and others, and many of my original tunes were recorded by various bands. My last adventure in the scene came at the end of the era—I played with Davie Allan's Arrows ("Apache '65") even while the British Invasion was slaughtering surf music. (After this, I smelled the coffee and jumped into the new vanguard—folk rock.)

But the list of Belairs' honors goes on—the second generation squad has notable credentials as well: Dickie Dodd (the former Mouseketeer who replaced Delvy on drums) made his mark a few years hence as drummer and lead singer for the Standells ("Dirty Water"). Guitarist Art Fisher played with the Belairs for a year, and then he and I played a few gigs billed as PJ & Artie (a guitar duo). After that he went on to join Delvy's Challengers; that's his lead guitar work all over their string of hit albums.

3) We had heart. Spirited interplay among dynamic personalities tends to enhance the art that results from the process. What is it about certain bands (the Beatles being the classic example) that sets them apart and imbues their music with that enigmatic quality we call *charisma*? It's more than just that they are good musicians; we often say about such bands that "the whole is greater than the sum of the parts." Herein, I think, lies a clue to the answer...

My experience has taught me that really *good* music—the kind that goes beyond entertaining us to *moving* us—is a testimony of something meaningful (worthwhile) that is going on in the life (or lives) it expresses; it is best understood as being a *byproduct* of the process of living a life of quality—that is, of scaling obstacles, resolving problems and growing in relationships. Good music is the audible fruit of these ongoing processes in the musician's life. On a subtle level, it provides the listener with a sort of "roadmap" through the areas of difficulty that the artist has encountered—he is "showing us the way." We may not consciously understand that this is occurring; all we know is that we are attracted to and *moved* by the music.

It may seem a bit high-minded to attribute something so profound to a "trivial" surf band like the Belairs; after all, wasn't our music just about simple, carefree living? Yes it was, but the harnessing of our talents into a well-functioning unit (as I described above) did *not* come easy! Rather, it came about only through hard work, much difficulty and countless squabbles (sometimes even outright warfare) that often threatened to destroy us. It was only by persevering through many agonies that we found our moments of ecstasy. And it was only that promise of ecstasy—our great love for the music and our compelling certainty of how good it *could* be—that spurred us on to persevere through the difficulties we had to overcome along the way.

We contended over ideas and strategies; we questioned each others motives; we criticized Eddie for seeming at times to be a glory hog, and we resented Delvy when he acted the autocrat; I took lumps for my headstrong nature and for insisting on having everybody do things my way. And we even got on levelheaded Chaz for refusing to take sides in our battles. (Thank God for Chaz—we could not have made it without him!)

But surrounding all of this was our view of the prize and our awareness that the only way we would ever obtain it was by working *together*. So we did what we had to do. In the process we matured; we developed character, and we learned to resolve our differences. We came to recognize each other's "flaws" as really just the rough edges of our qualities; we learned to give each other grace. Time and again I went from regarding these guys as a pain in the neck to loving them dearly as my best friends! In hindsight this makes perfect sense; for what is a true friend if he's not the guy you've gone through great trials with in a common quest to fulfill a worthy purpose? Some of the deepest lessons I've learned about life, love and relationships *began* with my exhilarating, exasperating experience with the Belairs.

If I had to pick one word to describe the quality we gained as a band by this experience, it would be *heart*. Again and again we found that we had to learn to make "music" with each other *as people* in order to make music as a band. I believe this process audibly enriched our music, and that's why I see it as perhaps the most important factor of all in the Belairs' equation!

- **In conclusion**

When I look back on these, my roots, I am amazed at what we accomplished in our youthful naiveté; for we had no idea of any larger significance to what we were doing. It was only with the surf-instro revival of the '80s that music historians began to scrutinize our movement and put it into a cultural perspective. Since then, it has become increasingly clear that the Belairs were part of something more than just the spawning of a regional phenomenon called surf music; I don't think it's overstating our case to say that we were one of that handful of original California "youth bands" who laid the foundation and defined the root attitude for thousands of others to follow in years to come. To this day, our sound and our attitude is reflected in more than just the music of a few neo-surf bands; I can hear it echoing all through the spectrum of contemporary music. What we began was passed down from one band to another, so that many of today's most creative young musicians, though they may not personally recall the Belairs, continue to build on the musical ideals we helped to define during the fabulous summer of '61.