

# Tripdavon Comes of Age

By [Drew Mackie](#), November 3, 2006

## S.B. Band Outlives I.V. and Goes Big



As a rule, the lifecycle of an Isla Vista band parallels the parties that serve as their most frequent gigs. No matter how raucous the party, an empty keg means the partygoers will be shuffling off to the next destination. In a similar way, scads of Isla Vista-spawned bands have flourished in the area's party-hungry, small venue-rich atmosphere, then all but vanished when, after four years, graduation sends the band's fan base — if not the members themselves — in different directions. It's a dilemma that's cursed many bands with short, glorious lives and abrupt ends.

Then there's [Tripdavon](#).

Well after three of the five members had graduated from UCSB, the band was riding a tour bus across Germany, Austria, Holland, and Hungary with Eric Burdon (renowned frontman of The Animals and War), playing to packed venues, and poised for the greatest exposure their band has gotten yet. On top of that, Tripdavon was fortunate enough to score a deal with Advanced Technology Office — the creators of the iSee, of a new attachment that can convert a standard iPod into a handheld video recorder — to be the only rock band to have videos packaged in with the product.

Indeed, the band defied convention by outliving its collegiate surroundings. But Tripdavon's members, who now live together in Montecito, haven't let their recent success cloud their judgment. The boys — Justin Fox, Greg Doscher, Adam Coons, Dave Heer, and Russ Cummings — are keenly aware that they are a young band yet to prove their potential on their sophomore release, *The Enlightened Operative*, which will be released on November 14. (Their CD release party, however, is on Thursday, November 9.) They have a respect for their Isla Vista roots and speak of rock legend Burdon in the properly reverent tone he deserves.



### The Burdon Connection

"He's just an amazing guy," said Doscher, 24, a New Jersey native who graduated from UCSB as a biopsychology major in 2004 but opted to continue as one of the Tripdavon's two guitarists instead of moving toward more scientific pursuits. Doscher said the experience on the road helped to bond the members of Tripdavon with Burdon, an industry-savvy rocker best known for hits like "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood," "Spill the Wine," and what is perhaps the most popular cover of "House of the Rising Sun." "By the end, he was up on stage with us, playing our closing song with us," Doscher said of Burdon. The favor was returned. Soon enough, Tripdavon was appearing with Eric Burdon and the Animals — as the

band is now called — for encores and playing songs like “Ring of Fire” and “Rockin’ in the Free World” before throngs of European fans.

It’s the stuff of college rock band dreams, really, but the members of this particular group speak of it professionally — not in the giddy, compliment-spewing manner most rock fans would describe such a meeting. “He’s one of the best performers we’ve ever seen, but he was way cool with us,” said Cummings, 27, the band’s drummer and a Santa Barbara native. “He had enough respect for us to let us play on stage with him.” Vocalist Justin Fox said the experience with Burdon proved a pivotal event for Tripdavon. “It was a life-changing experience. It’s something I never thought I would get to do in my life,” he said.

Tripdavon was initially supposed to play at Burdon’s 2005 CD release party at the Viper Room in Los Angeles, but when that gig fell through, Burdon summoned the band on his European tour. Fox, 27, a longtime Santa Barbara resident who has known Burdon as a family friend since childhood, said yes. Though the other four were more than eager to put their lives in Santa Barbara on hold. “That very day, I nearly cut my hair off for a job I was going to get at the Doubletree,” said Cummings.

Indeed, most California college bands probably wouldn’t expect to ever play in small Austrian towns that, despite populations as small as 500, could still muster crowds of up to 3,000 at their respective venues. Naturally, the presence of Burdon helped draw attention, but Tripdavon’s members credit the online social network MySpace with helping get their sound out, both at home and abroad.

“In Europe, fans had never heard of us before,” said Heer, the band’s bassist. “That’s why MySpace is perfect for where we are right now. If someone likes your kind of music, they can contact you and you can contact them without you ever being in the same place before.” The site allows visiting bands in any community to give prospective fans a chance to listen to their music days before they even have to come to town. It’s the modern equivalent of standing on a street corner and passing out fliers, and, thus, has become a critical tool in building Tripdavon’s fan base so far.



“People had gotten stoked on our band just by looking us up on MySpace,” Cummings said. In addition to posting free music samples, MySpace allows the band to update fans with news — quickly and for free. Of course, even without MySpace, Tripdavon’s status as a homegrown California band holds a certain appeal as well. “They don’t know we’re from Isla Vista,” Fox said. “To them, we’re a rock band from Southern California. And that alone is a big deal.”

## Weed Magic

As much as the boys like to recall their European tour, however, they admit that a truer test of the band’s abilities was recording the second album. Upon returning from their time with Burdon, Tripdavon migrated up north, to the quiet streets of Weed, California. There they worked with Sylvia Massy, whose multimedia recording complex occupies a full city block in the town and who had previously produced albums for Tool, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, and Prince.

Beginning on June 7, the band worked hard recording for about 40 days in Weed. The outcome: what the boys estimate is their most mature sound yet. They’ve got nothing but gratitude for Massey’s influence over the project. “A good thing about Sylvia is that she has this strong engineering background... She has a zen-like mastery when it comes to recording,” Fox said. “She’ll want a certain sound and she’ll know how to get it.”

In addition to meeting deadlines and living up to creative potential, the recording was met with the unforeseen difficulty of unexpected power outage from a lightning strike. The band took the setbacks in

stride, and, all in all, they amounted to a polished final product. Doscher explained that one song in particular, “Never Let You Go,” was presenting a few problems. “It needed some work. Mostly the chorus. But the verses and the bridge too,” he joked. In the end, Massey’s tutelage helped find the gems buried within the song’s faulty structure and re-build it into one of the new album’s stronger tracks.

“In my opinion, we developed a more cohesive sound,” Doscher said. “[Massey] had concept of how the album would come together — how it would flow and how the songs belonged together.” Fox agreed, “The production was amazing. When we first heard the demos, we were like, ‘Wow, I can’t believe this is us.’” The boys count the recording experience as a good one. They speak proudly of *The Enlightened Operative* and fondly of their time in Weed. “It was kind of like *The Twilight Zone*. You’d wake up and everybody had disappeared,” Fox said. “We got really good at shuffleboard, though.”

The album represents a kind of rock that defies the subcategorization befalling so many other musical efforts. No prefixes, no hyphens, no “alt,” no “indie” — just rock in the purest sense. “In the end, if you have a guitar and drums, you’re a rock band,” said Coons, guitarist and a New York native who arrived in California to study at UCSB. He sums up the band well — it truly defies labels, though the overall sound could be compared to rock acts like Pearl Jam, Soundgarden, or Incubus. It’s a genre that stands out even though it shouldn’t, especially in the hip-hop and reggae-saturated Santa Barbara music scene.

## Remembering Their Roots

However selective downtown might be about live music acts, however, Tripdavon originally flourished in Isla Vista, where throngs of wandering revelers allow for a greater variety of musical acts. “I’d rather take the backyard in I.V, honestly. If you’re in I.V., you know if you’re playing a good show,” Fox said. “If you’re not, then everybody gets out their cell phones and starts talking.” Fox compared Isla Vista favorably to other cities in which Tripdavon has performed. “In Los Angeles, for example, there’s just so much more to do. Live entertainment and art and all that, plays and museums,” he said. “Here, a live music act is a bigger deal.”

Heer agreed. “It’s great, if just for the sheer number of venues... It’s a natural outlet,” he said. While studying at Santa Barbara City College. Heer, 24, lived in I.V. with bandmates Doscher and Coons. They were jamming together, trying to make what they could of their combined musical talents, when they met up with Fox and Cummings. Soon, the five were playing as a band and developing a shared vision about what a new take on modern rock might be like.

The band’s first gig had them performing at an apartment complex on Del Playa Drive for 400 I.V. partiers. They called it 6525-Palooza. “In I.V., you have a captive audience,” Doshier said. “We had people lying on their roof and listening to our first gig. It was great...The kind of energy you find in IV — you just can’t match that anywhere else.”



Tripdavon played at UCSB’s annual Reel Loud in 2004 event under the name Audiophile. The members were pleased with their sound but they knew the original name was a clunker. Although initially cagey about the etymology of “Tripdavon,” the band’s members now freely admit that the name came from their initial rehearsal space’s proximity to a Vons grocery store. Music breaks often resulted in a “trip to Vons,” which the five eventually slurred into the band name. While touring, the band found that “Tripdavon” comes close to a German profanity, though the name never caused them trouble while abroad.

Whatever the origin of “Tripdavon,” the name has served the band well, as success so far can testify. Owners of the iSee nationwide are able to view a packaged-in Tripdavon video upon purchasing the product. Mike Dikas, director of marketing for the Advanced Technology Office, is a family friend of Heer’s and thought the upstart band would be perfect to use as a sample for the iSee’s capabilities. “I felt their

music addressed a key demographic for the iSee product,” Dikas said. “We needed a band that was right on the brink of making it big, who shared our start-up mentality and could see the benefit of a mutual swap of services.”

Though word of Tripdavon may spread beyond Santa Barbara, the members maintain that they like to think of the band as a local fixture. “Our home is always going to be Santa Barbara,” Fox said. “Every time we leave, it’s amazing to get back... Coming up over that hill and seeing Santa Barbara and the ocean and smelling that sweet air.” Whether here or away, Tripdavon seems keen on pushing as far as it can. “We’re going to ride this thing until the wheels far off,” said Doscher.

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Tripdavon releases *The Enlightened Operative* with a CD release party at Velvet Jones on Thursday, November 9. The CD hits store shelves on November 14. For more info, see [www.tripdavon.com](http://www.tripdavon.com).