

When art-school experimentalists, **THE LUMINOUS BIPEDS**, merged talents with the technically accomplished improv trio, **IDIO-SAVANT**, in 1979, the emergent compound produced sparks. At first, while the dynamic new music the band wrote and performed was difficult to describe to outsiders, audiences understood intuitively and responded immediately — by dancing.

The members of **IDIO-SAVANT**, Danny Finney (sax,v), Paul Watson (tr,gtr,v), and Pippin Barnett (dr,v), were already interested in expanding beyond pure free-improvisation, into more beat-driven song forms, with lyrics and collaborative composition, so, when Rebbly Sharp (gtr,v) and Phil Trumbo (b,v) joined them for a few “jamming” sessions in late 1979, a mutual, reciprocal enjoyment led to the formation of **THE ORTHO-TONES**, who quickly became the **ORTHOTONICS**. At the same time that the new band began to develop, **IDIO SAVANT** was still playing as a working trio, actively and separately, and they continued to do so until well into the eighties.

In 1980 the **ORTHOTONICS** circulated a handmade live concert tape called “Corrective Music” and then in 1981, they released a self-produced 7-inch, picture-sleeve single, “Doo Doo Cars/Woman Fish.” That, in turn, was followed in 1983 by an album-length, studio-recording, “Accessible as Gravity,” which was distributed in cassette format only. Throughout this busy period, the band continued to write and play, consistently refining their complex process of composition and arrangement as they went.

In a move to push the rhythm section forward, bassist and film student Tom Carson replaced Trumbo in 1982, and the revamped line-up played on the band’s first vinyl LP, “Wake Up You Must Remember,” (1984), recorded by Bruce Olsen, with last-minute mixing production by **FRED FRITH**.

In 1985, Tom Carson left the band to work at film-making. Without a bass, the material was rearranged and the quartet added keyboard by Sharp to the mix. Later in the year, Paul Watson departed to play with a wide variety of other musicians, but the band forged on, developing strength, and attracting attention, now as a streamlined trio.

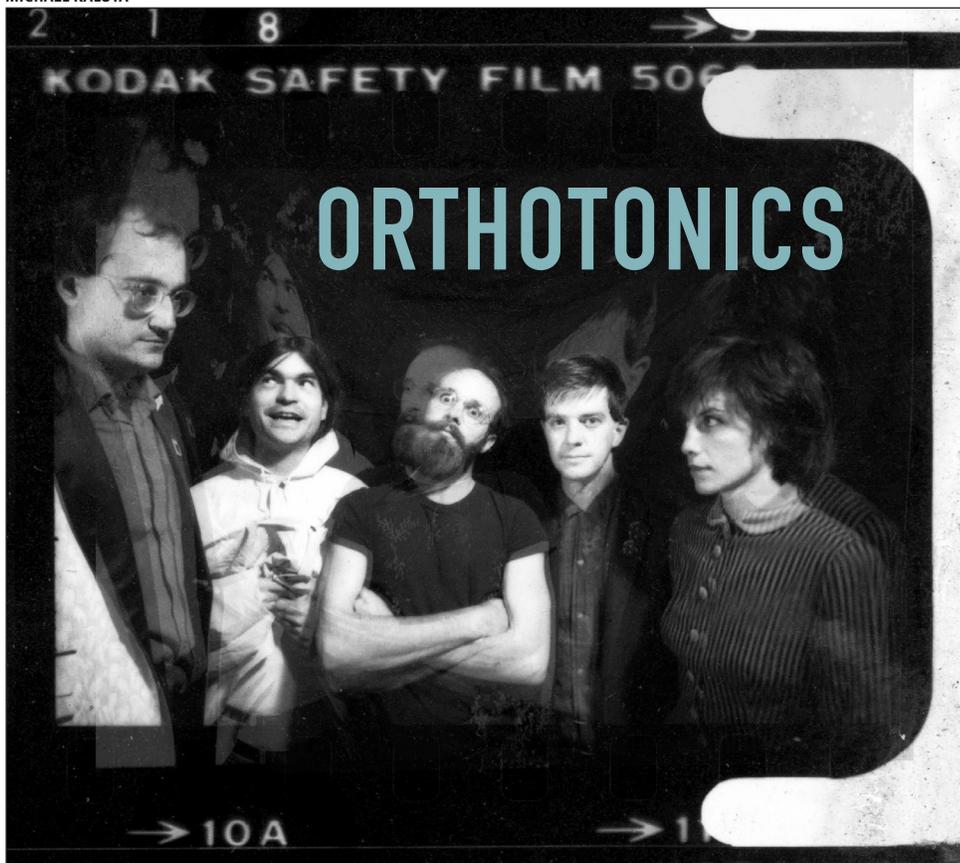
Then, in 1986, Sharp, Finney, and Barnett, working in marathon sessions, co-composed “**Luminous Bipeds**,” their second and most sonically refined LP, with **FRED FRITH** producing. The band then began to travel widely in support of their new release.

Rebbly Sharp remembers: “Rec-Rec, our Swiss label, with its connection to affiliated labels/promoters (i.e. Germany’s ‘No Man’s Land’ and Zorko of Ljubljana, Yugoslavia) was instrumental in developing our European tours in ‘86, ‘87 and ‘89, and Daniel Waldner of Zurich was particularly dedicated to working with us. Amy Denio, of Seattle, a musician and vocalist of exceptional energy, brought us to the West Coast for a small tour which included Vancouver and Portland. Later, we were invited to play in the Victoriaville festival in Quebec through the efforts of New York-based Rift Records. And details of our gigs during an ill-fated tour through the South, however, are best forgotten, although some good stories came from that expedition.

Following the last of 3 European tours, three years later, in 1989, the group finally called it quits, each moving on to other projects.

**EUGENE CHADBOURNE** at ALLMUSIC says that the Orthotonics were “unusual” with material “of great interest from the standpoint of text, as well as musically.” Music writer **PIERO SCARUFFI** has described the group as “one of the most surreal and unpredictable combos of the era,” and said they were an important link between 1970s European and 1990s American Progressive rock.

MICHAEL KALUTA



L-R: Phil Trumbo, Danny Finney, Pippin Barnett, Paul Watson, Rebbly Sharp

**BAND MEMBERS:**

- Rebby Sharp** (1979–1989) — guitar, vocals  
**Danny Finney** (1979–1989) — saxophone, vocals  
**Pippin Barnett** (1979–1989) — drums  
**Paul Watson** (1979–1984) — trumpet, guitar  
**Phil Trumbo** (1979–1982) — bass guitar  
**Tom Carson** (1982–1984) — bass guitar

# ORTHOTONICS



**TAKE IT! Magazine** (Boston, 1980): “...the Orthotonics, from Richmond, Virginia, have managed to attain a degree of maturity, intelligence and force that most other groups spend entire careers vainly trying to muster.”

**OPTION Magazine** (Olympia, WA, 1981): “I love ‘Woman Fish,’ especially the vocals (Rebby Sharp, sounding like a cross between Abbey Lincoln and Malvina Reynolds) and the guitar intro, leading into reggae percussion, dreamy horns — and that riveting vocal. Unusual, you bet — an anthem if I ever heard one, true inspiration.”

In an interview published in **OPTION Magazine** in 1983 Rebby Sharp described “Corrective Music” as “...the juxtaposition of the accessible and the surprise. And obviously, the improv sections are the surprise... a ‘doorway’ into something new.”

**NATIONAL NEWS BUREAU** (Philadelphia, 1983): “...as a blend of European and American rock with Third World rhythms and melodies, or what the band itself calls ‘Corrective Music,’ wherein words, rock-funk and improvisation are turned inside-out.”

**PLAYBOY** (1984): “Artsy, antsy, avant-garde and arresting; and Rebby Sharp’s vocals are full of pouting, smart femininity.”

**SOUNDS Magazine** (U.K., January, 1985): “A weird distortion of Red Crayola, Pere Ubu, and Pigbag with the precision of Defunkt.”

**OPTION Magazine** (July/August, 1986): “Every once in awhile, you come across a group that uses so many different ideas, from such diverse sources and combines them in such an inventive way, that the standard terminology simply doesn’t apply. Case in point: the Orthotonics.”

**DISORDER Magazine** (Vancouver, B.C., November, 1986): “They share a kinship with such groups as France’s Etron Fou and Les i, Switzerland’s Debile Menthol and American groups V-Effect and Skeleton Crew ...highly inventive and infinitely danceable.”

**NMR Magazine** (NY, NY, 1986): “Cubist Picasso squeezed through sax, guitar, keyboards and drums... All herky-jerky rhythmic and bursting with angularity, yet oddly gentle and emotive, too...”

**SKALP 5 Magazine** (France, 1986): “...this trio is involved in rewriting rock music according to new parameters... an engaged art form, an energetic rock with complex structures, solid in its inspiration; it is fragile and strong at the same time.”

**THROTTLE Magazine** (Richmond, VA, 1986): “It is fundamentally intelligent music, and it demands fundamental intelligence from its listeners....” Luminous Bipeds” (is) ...the best local album I’ve ever heard. It’s expressive, rhythmically complex, lyrical, playful and pleasantly dense... There is no other band around anywhere, I am convinced, quite like the Orthotonics.”

**FORBIDDEN MUSIC Blog** (2007) : “ ... one of the most idiosyncratic trios (drummer, sax/vox, guitar/keys/vox) ever to play rock sensu lato (“in the broad sense”).

**HOT DIGNITY DOG!**  
SATURDAY DEC. 17  
**ORTHOTONICS**  
ROCKITZ  
LAUREL & BROAD



**HALF · JAPANESE**  
ORTHOTONICS  
also showing:  
2 MUSIC FILMS  
starring  
THE RESIDENTS  
Heiko Skrimmy  
R.A.W. 1717 EAST MAIN \$3.509-30 SAT.FEB.7

## 1979-1983

Rebby Sharp on the band's beginning: "Many were the evenings that we would get together, usually at Billy's or Phil's on Grace Street and improvise on crazy little electronics, bongos, sticks, automatic poems, guitars and cheap amps. Whoever showed up was the 'band.' This continued for years involving Karen, Gussie, Les, whoever. There were always monikers, band names. 'Luminous Bipeds' was one. We used it for a fairly well-documented first-and-only gig at the Richmond Artists' Workshop (also the first ever I played electric guitar in public).

At the same time, Idio-Savant was getting together at Dundee and playing a much more cohesive free-improvisational jazz. They played at Main Street Grill and of course R.A.W. I had wanted to play free-rock style improv with these guys, aspiring to something like Pere Ubu. They said they were interested IF I brought Phil.

I had the '64 Belair and drove us all across town down to the Shockoe Bottom to rehearse either at Pippin's, on the second floor across from the Grill, or at R.A.W. We recorded these sessions on a cheap tape recorder and began to devise our compositions and 'sound.'

Our first gig was at the 'Small Works' art show opening at R.A.W. Dec. 1979 and it was a hit. The crowd went wild.

Our ability to start and stop 'songs' with uncanny accuracy was also encouragement to continue. Jon Graham was doing great photo shoots and documentation at that time, and Phil was making cool posters for the Ortho-tones. He and I finally convinced the others that we were indeed a 'band.' The 9:30 Club gigs and our release of a cassette of live recordings further legitimized our endeavor, too.

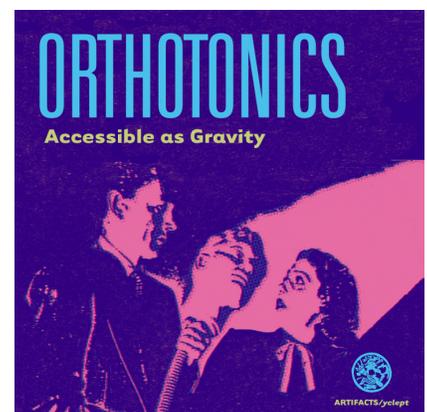
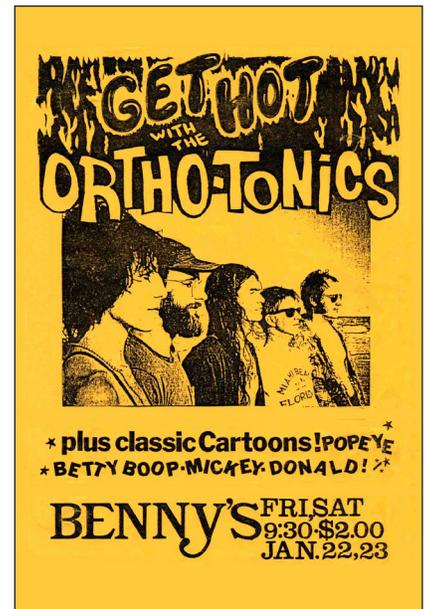
We had fun."

JON GRAHAM



L-R: Pippin Barnett, Paul Watson, Rebby Sharp, Danny Finney, Phil Trumbo

**PAUL WATSON**, quoted in **THROTTLE Magazine** in 1980, said: "Bob George from **110 RECORDS** — the guy from New York City who is partly responsible for **VOLUME**, a discography of new music (see [wikipedia.org/wiki/B.\\_George](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/B._George)), put together a sampler tape of what he personally thought was the best stuff happening in America and sent it to **JOHN PEEL** in London. So, we were played on the John Peel Show and we got a lot of attention from that. It really, in a lot of ways, put us on the map."



## 1984-1985

**REBBY SHARP:** “We spent weeks, months in the Flood Zone studio with Bruce Olsen. We even used the studio to try out compositions. Coby Batty recorded a few songs with us there, too, ‘New Humans’ was one. Margaret Freund and Mason Wyatt were great encouragers in this project and partners in ‘Flood Zone /Generic Records’ with Bruce. I doubt we would have stayed together if the project had not happened and it also almost broke us up. It was time-consuming and wearying, yet we did truly love the material and saw the recording of an LP as necessary to proceed in getting gigs that would be satisfying both aesthetically and financially and would document the compositions.

When Fred Frith came on board, he helped breathe life in the overwrought assemblage, by selecting and editing in ways we could not and using mixing board techniques that were exhilarating.”

## 1986-1989

In a 1986 **RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH** interview, **DANNY FINNEY** described the band’s complicated song writing methodology: “We’re all contributing ideas, which may seem very disparate or quirky, yet on another level we’re all working together as a unit; a delicate balance that can intrigue you and bother you, too. It’s like storytelling: People come up with new ways of saying something — old story, but new inflection or a new way of phrasing. We’ve been playing together for so long that, even if we haven’t articulated how we work, we start to know in our heads and hearts how it happens. Egos still get bruised, or at least twinged, but the process gives us interesting, crazy stuff.”

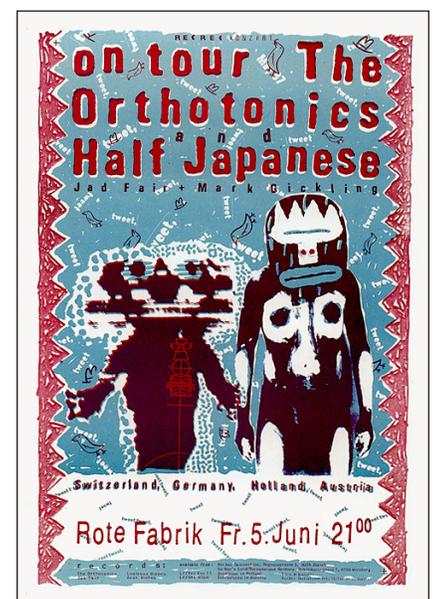
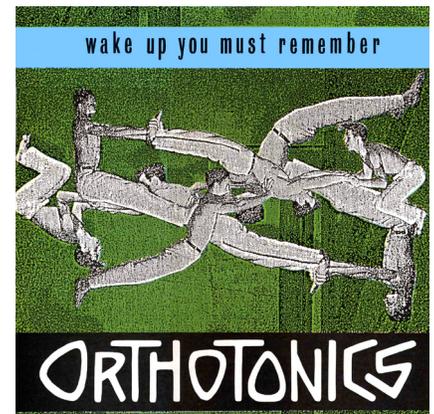
According to **PIPPIN BARNETT**, “We met **FRED FRITH** through his performances at R.A.W. (Richmond Artists Workshop), and later, in 1983, I joined his band, Curlew, when Fred was playing bass. In 1986 Frith and the Orthotonics recorded and mixed ‘Luminous Bipeds’ over for 10 long days, some longer than others!”



**REBBY SHARP** on how they recorded “Luminous Bipeds” with **FRED FRITH** producing: “What was the name of the studio...it was in Shockoe Bottom. We got a good deal. The recording, editing and mixing of Luminous Biped was a more collaborative process than ‘Wake Up You Must Remember.’ The idea in Chris Cutler’s (one of Fred’s band mates in Henry Cow) essay on using the recording studio as but another instrument in the musicians’ hands was in full effect. Fred had been producing, recording and mixing several other bands he liked at the time as a way to work with people

and we were glad to have this opportunity and experience. It was condensed and cohesive because we had a limited time frame and were of a singular mind, whereas ‘Wake Up...’ was overly open-ended and scattered. Quite a lot of the recording was done ‘live.’ Our overdubbing was exacting.

Fred would say ‘quality is our hallmark’ at all turns and ‘right...don’t give up your day job.’ The ‘noise gate’ (‘nose plate’) was often used. A guitar part I couldn’t master in time (for ‘Square...’) was recorded in such a way that it could be sped up to match the song’s tempo. We were encouraged to e-nun-ci-ate. We had a grand time.”



The Orthotonics toured in Europe three times between 1986 and 1989, playing in Austria, France, Germany, Holland, Switzerland and the former Yugoslavia.

## THE BAND THEN AND NOW:

# ORTHOTONICS

### REBBY SHARP – guitar & vocals

“Overlapping the Ortho-activities in the Eighties was my solo 45 on Zensor, enjoyable ‘Half-Japanese’ recording and performing, ‘6 month Orchestra,’ ‘Ululating Mummies,’ ‘Butterglove,’ several throw-together ensembles specifically for limited performance such as ‘Entire Face,’ ‘Wicked/Sacred,’ ‘Shared Skitless,’ ‘Band-of-the-House-on-Pine,’ etc., solo recording for Shimmy Disc and lyrics contributed to several ‘Skeleton Crew’ compositions. In the Nineties were ‘Rattlemouth’ performances and recordings, a 45 with Michael Hurley recorded in the cabin I moved to from Richmond where I began learning/playing fiddle for traditional Appalachian string-band music. ‘The Jet Set Hobo Allstars’ and ‘The Uncomfortable Hunk of Metal String Band’ were two loosely formed bands among untold numbers of performing and ‘picking’ ensembles to follow. Mark Jickling included me recording and performing in both ‘Old Songs’ and most recently, ‘Book of Amy’ projects/bands. I now teach music foundation on piano and guitar and I LOVE it. Thank you to all these musicians!”

### PIPPIN BARNETT – drums & vocals

Played with: Idio-Savant, Orthotonics, Curlew, Nimal, L’Ensemble Raye, Famous Actors from Out of Town (F.A.F.O.O.T.), Gibbon Hick, No Safety, Boom. He’s played with: Tim Hodgkinson, Fred Frith, Chris Cochrane, Shirley Ann Hoffman, Shelly Hirsch, Nicolas Collins, Hans Reichel, Hahn Rowe, Wayne Horvitz, Don Byron, Dave Douglas, Jad Fair, Mark Dresser, Zeena Parkins and Catherine Jauniaux. Currently playing with: The Richmond Indigenous Gourd Orchestra, Ululating Mummies, and Happy Lucky Combo.

### DANNY FINNEY – sax & vocals

Has been in and played with Idio-Savant, Idio (trio), Orthotonics, Ululating Mummies, and Hotel X, and he currently plays with “World Groove/Ethio Jazz” band, Rattlemouth (rattlemouth.com).

### PAUL WATSON – trumpet & vocals

Played with: Little Annie, Jonathan Vassar. Paul Wallfisch, Christiiane Hommelsheim, Stella Veloce, Idio-Savant, And the Wiremen, Bee and Flower, Pete Simonelli, No Grave Like the Sea, Chris Becker, Sparklehorse, Michael Hurley, FSK, and Patrick Phelan. Currently playing with Malhombre and he released a solo album, “My Secret Effect,” in 2014 (paulwatson.bandcamp.com/album/my-secret-effect).

### PHIL TRUMBO – bass

Played with “intuitive sound” act the Richmond City Band and with the Vampire Cows and the Luminous Bipeds. An artist and animator first, Trumbo went on to a career in film and television, working with Gary Panter and Wayne White on “Pee Wee’s Playhouse” in the late Eighties and winning an Emmy for his direction of the opening credits. He has since worked in the electronic game industry, art directing more than 100 video games, including “Harry Potter” and “Lord of the Rings.” In the process, he’s worked with soundtrack composers, Matt Malley, Jeremy Sole and Mark Mothersbaugh. He also continues to record his own music at home.

### TOM CARSON – bass

Played with Speakeasy, Inscape, and in California with Vessel, Bubble of Tranquility and Livin’ Large. He is currently living in San Francisco where he works as a freelance videographer.

In 1989 after the Orthotonics split up, Sharp and Finney later reunited in the alternative rock group, **RATTELMOUTH**. Sharp also released a solo album, “In One Mouth and Out the Other” in 1989, on which Fred Frith performed. **THE ULULATING MUMMIES** (led by Barry Bless) early activities involved Barnett, Finney and later Sharp, so that although the Orthotonics split in ‘89, the music-making continued...



Rebby Sharp

MICHAEL KALUTA



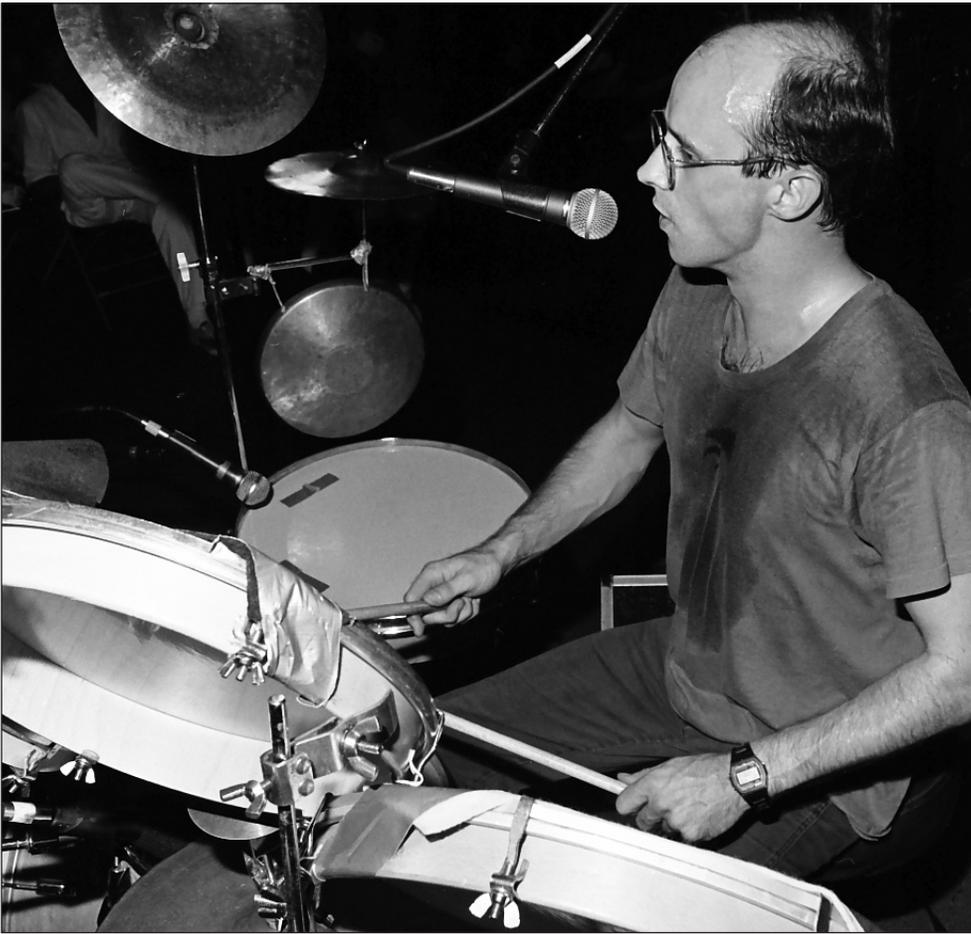
Paul Watson

DAVID STOVER



Tom Carson

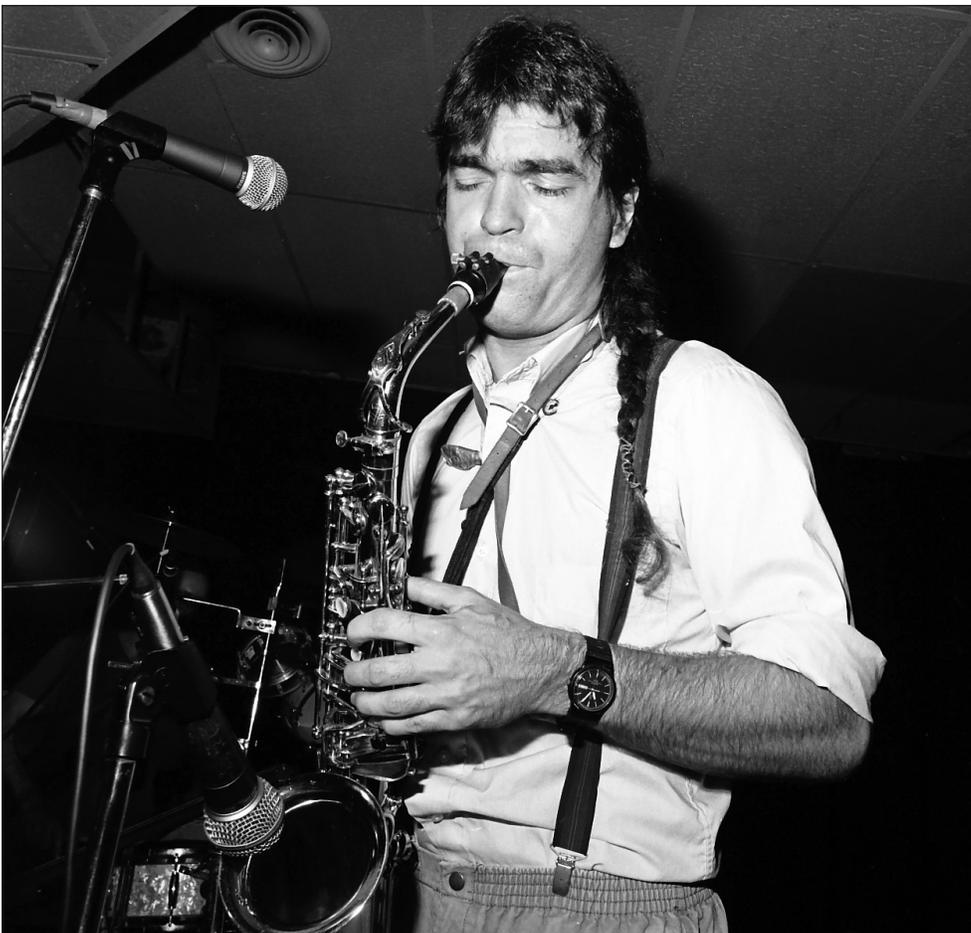
DAVID STOVER



Pippin Barnett



Rebby Sharp



Danny Finney

PHOTOS BY DAVID STOVER (1986)

**ORTHO-TONICS**  
and the **RED CROSS**  
Psychic Disco  
**STUFFY'S** **sunday aug.30**  
9:30 \$2

**ORTHO-TONICS**  
BEACH PARTY!  
"Wall Mount Again"  
COPA FRI,SAT,AUG.7,8,9:30  
\$200

**ORTHO-TONICS**  
**BENNY'S** AUG.21,22  
9:30 \$2.00  
Featuring a Special Program of Unusual Films!

**ORTHO-TONICS**  
**SANDY'S** SATURDAY  
APRIL 18  
12:30-1:30am  
\$2.00

**THIS SUNDAY!**  
**ORTHO-TONICS**  
STRAIGHTEN UP & FLY CORRECT  
**STUFFY'S** 9:30  
611 N HARRISON, CAL 93

**CORRECTIVE MUSIC**  
**ORTHO-TONICS**  
GRACE PLACE PATIO 9:30  
B26wGRACE \$2.00

mystery dance  
**ORTHO-TONICS**  
**GOIN BANANAS** 13" B CARY  
SAT. OCT 18 9:30

**ORTHO-TONICS**  
**MIKE TIGHE & THE BOWTIES**  
TUESDAY-OCT.7  
**HARD TIMES**

**ORTHO-TONICS**  
XMAS PARTY!  
CARTOONS  
BETTY BOOP POPPE DONALD DUCK AND MORE  
AND FEATURING THE NEW ISSUE OF  
BOYS & GIRLS GROW UP NO. 2  
BENNY'S ONLINE PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST  
**SATURDAY DEC.19, 9:30\$2**  
R. AW1717 EAST MAIN

**For Health...**  
IT PAYS TO BE CAREFUL!  
**CORRECTIVE MUSIC**  
BY THE  
**ORTHO-TONICS**  
SATURDAY AUGUST 2  
GRACE PLACE PATIO  
B26wGRACE 9:30  
\$2.00

**ORTHO-TONICS**  
**DEMON SHOW**  
-COSTUME PARTY-  
PULL OUT THE BEST -WORK AND LIGHT COULING-  
**HARDTIMES** 9:30-12:15

**HALF-JAPANESE**  
**ORTHO-TONICS**  
THE HERETICS  
\$3.50 \$30  
R. AW1717 EAST MAIN SALPSET

**ORTHO-TONICS**  
AND THE RE-DEFORMED  
**BARRIERS**  
BOWS YOU AND YOUR MONEY TO  
**MICHEL'S BAR** FRIDAY SAT. SUN  
JUNE 27 & 28 9:30 \$2.00

**For Health...**  
IT PAYS TO BE CAREFUL!  
**CORRECTIVE MUSIC**  
BY THE  
**ORTHO-TONICS**  
SATURDAY AUGUST 2  
GRACE PLACE PATIO  
B26wGRACE 9:30  
\$2.00

Do Unseen Hands  
Keep You Dumb?  
**THE**  
**CORRECTIVE MUSIC BY THE**  
**ORTHO-TONICS**  
Main st. Grill  
Friday May 9  
9:00

**DANCE UNTIL YOU DIE**  
**ORTHO-TONICS**  
AND THE  
**MILLIONAIRES**  
FRISAT  
BENNY'S 9:30 \$3.00

**ORTHO-TONICS**  
**HERETICS**  
FRISAT  
BENNY'S 9:30 \$2.00  
Bry 1571st St  
Dance Until You Die

**DANCE UNTIL YOU DIE**  
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**THE ULULATING MUMMIES** (led by Barry Bless) early activities involved Barnett, Finney and later Sharp, so that although the Orthotonics split in '89, the music-making continued. Sharp left Richmond in '92 but returned by commute to join the already formed **RATTLEMOUTH** in '93, which was a trio of Danny Finney, Tom Brickman and Robbie Kinter (also members of Ululating Mummies). It was this line-up which is heard on the Cunneiform release "Walking a Full Moon Dog." (See Rattlemouth.com)

Rebby Sharp says, "A characteristic of a music/art scene is the taking-on of simultaneous projects. Members of a 'band' could have many and variously sounding ensembles and solo shows. This is what differentiates our activities from say a group of people who forge a "band identity" for promotion and consumption. This is why there are so many over-lapping 'entities' in our history".