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STEPHEN KENT ... On the didgeridoo at the 'Shoe.
— Warren Toda, SUN

California band brings back sedate state

Being Trance-ported

By **KIERAN GRANT**
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Let us be subjective for a second. The point behind two of music's latest victims — ambient and trance — is for the sounds to take you to that abstract place in your mind.

This is not something club atmosphere can enhance.

So, San Francisco-based collective Trance Mission, had their work cut out for them with their live trance session at the Horseshoe Sunday.

Rather than fall prey to the decidedly un-trance-friendly ambience of the 'Shoe, the trio idled easily through two relaxed but spellbinding sets.

Led by gifted clarinet player Beth Custer and didgeridoo master Stephen Kent, both veterans of the much-respected outfit Lights In A Fat City, Trance Mission also managed to break the "no-man's land"

syndrome that dogs sparsely-attended rock and pop shows.

They filled that vast gap between stage and audience simply by asking the compliant crowd to move up.

They then allowed the half-filled room to witness some of the mysteries

relegated to the signals on the group's 1994 self-titled debut CD and its follow up, *Meanwhile*.

Club Scene

Trance Mission were not a visual act in any "performance" sense. Still, their hypnotic melding of jazz, funk, noise, Australian aboriginal traditions, and just about every form of percussion barring electronics, displayed both a knowledge of, and a pleasant disregard for, form.

Custer's sharply contrasting salvos of chirps and growls from her bass clarinet accented the constant drone of Kent's didgeridoo and the

intense work of guest percussionist Robin Adnan Anders, resulting in a vivid, atmospheric groove. Periodic use of homemade wind-makers and angel tubes (those plastic hoses you spin above your head) added to the purely acoustic ambient feel.

But surprisingly, it was when the group shifted out of the loose, improv-oriented pieces and into more melodic jazz-styled tunes that they hit their peak.

Kent strapped on a cello and played funk bass riffs, while Anders bashed a bass drum as if in a poly-rhythmic marching band. Custer's virtuosity on clarinet then took over.

Trance Mission somehow linked minimalism with complexity in their music. They didn't pay heed to just how strong a group of players they are, never breaking the unity of their sound with solos or fancy time changes.

The trance, it seemed, was there for them as much as it was for us.