



RICHARD HARTOG/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Music and surfing make for a perfect marriage, says Dave Kaplan, the owner of Surfdog Productions, at the Venice Pier.

By Kim Irwin  
STAFF WRITER

**D**ave Kaplan is a surfer at heart.

Sure, he's a big-time businessman and a husband and father, a respectable, upstanding Venice resident.

Inside, though, he'll always be a gnarly dude shooting the curl of life, grooving on the serenity of the sea and living the surf culture.

Maybe that's why Kaplan, 36, named his fledgling record and marketing company Surfdog. He even tolerates with good grace the friendly jibes about him being . . . ahem . . . the top dog.

"Surfing is very soulful," said Kaplan, a dark-haired, dark-eyed and well-tanned native Westsider. "It embodies freedom and youth and tranquillity and spirituality. It's about the sun and the beach and girls. It's everything that is so magic about Southern California. Many of those same qualities apply to music, too."

A perfect marriage, surfing and music.

But Surfdog isn't just about surf music, the guitar-laden beach sound that's making a comeback these days, thanks in part to the movie "Pulp Fiction." Surfdog is about the surf culture and environmental awareness. The music business is highly competitive, but Kaplan won't sign an artist or record an

## CHAIRMAN of the BOARD

Venice man incorporates a serene beach attitude into his music business, Surfdog Productions

album that doesn't reflect those values.

### Pet causes

He insists that his company mirror his morals and ideals, as well as push his favorite cause, saving the Mother Ocean. Every Surfdog product, from CDs to T-shirts to beach towels to baseball caps, bears the company motto: "Please Help Preserve Our Oceans."

"I love the ocean and the whole beach lifestyle," said Kaplan, who grew up in Phoenix and began surfing as 17-year-old college student in Santa Barbara. "The ocean to

many of us is the most spiritual place on earth. Its sheer power and unpredictability demand respect."

Kaplan is working with the Surfrider Foundation to produce a benefit album to raise money to clean up the oceans. Called M.O.M. (Mend Our Mother), the album will feature the music of Pearl Jam, Perry Farrell's Porno for Pyros, the Brian Setzer Orchestra and others. The album is set for a spring release.

Gary Hoey of Venice, who

recorded the soundtrack for "The Endless Summer II," is one of Surfdog's artists.

Kaplan's commitment to his ideals is what prompted Hoey to sign on, he said.

### 'Down to earth'

"Dave Kaplan to me is a wonderful human being in every aspect," Hoey said. "He's done great things with Surfdog records and he's getting involved in great projects. At the same time, he is always a real person and very down to earth. That in itself shows me where his heart is."

Hoey, whose music is instrumental, had trouble getting a record deal. Then he met Kaplan. Since signing on with Kaplan, he has recorded four solo albums, including the surf movie soundtrack, and has been able to quit his "day job" and concentrate on music.

"He was the guy who believed in me when no one else did," Hoey said. "I owe a lot to him."

Surfdog also represents Sprung Monkey, a band whose music is featured in several surfing and snow-boarding videos, and Harry Perry, the turbaned Venice icon best known for playing electric guitar while skating up and down the boardwalk. Other Surfdog acts include Dano, a Vermont trio who play melodic music with cynical lyrics, and Liquid Black, a foursome fronted by an

SURFDOG/B2

## Surfdog

FROM PAGE B1

American Indian. Kaplan has represented musicians for about 10 years, starting with UB40, and now manages such artists as Setzer, of the former Stray Cats.

He launched Surfdog three years ago as a three-pronged venture. It includes the record label, a marketing arm which serves as a liaison between major labels and the trend-setting surf community and a merchandising company that manufactures

T-shirts Kaplan designs himself.

The stick figure Surfdog logo and the child-like shirt designs — with names like Fishboy, Butt Shark and Rasta Trout — are meant to be uncomplicated and carefree, Kaplan said.

Besides, he can't draw.

Surfdog is doing well, Kaplan said. Although he doesn't long for mega-bucks stardom, he said he wants his company to grow so his artists get more exposure.

"We are able to make it year after year and be proud of the music we put out, so I'm really proud," he said. "If I can continue to do that and make a living, I'll be happy."

When he's not signing artists, recording albums or surfing, Kaplan happily steps into the role of husband and father. He has been married for 10 years to his wife, Suzie, and has two children, Jamie, 2, and Mark, 2 months. And,