

Ohio natives find home in Asheville music scene

By Sam Hunt

ASSISTANT ARTS & FEATURES EDITOR
SCHUNT@UNCA.EDU

King Tut's uplifting instrumental rock has expanded the sound of UNC Asheville's diverse music scene since the band relocated from Bay Village, Ohio, in fall 2007.

Inspired by math rock, indie rock and jazz, King Tut brings together a wide variety of tastes and styles, both obscure and mainstream. King Tut's guitarist, Mark Boyd, said the band's live shows have not always appealed to dancers.

"People just started dancing at our shows recently, which is probably directly correlated with the increasing number of UNCA student attendees," said Boyd, 21, UNCA environmental science student. "UNCA kids know the how and when of putting a rug."

Before forming King Tut, Boyd played two bands, a post-rock band called By Us & Moan and the free-improv, drum-heavy band, Neematoad.

"Drew and I went to high school together in Bay Village, a suburb of Cleveland. Drew went through a slew of music programs, including jazz band and marching band," Boyd said. "At our first concert at someone's basement back home, Drew came up to me and asked if he could be in the band. We've clicked as musicians and friends ever since."

Boyd and drummer Drew Veres moved to Asheville to take a year off from school and reinvent their music base. By mid-2008 the two-piece had prepared a full-length album, and Boyd and Veres performed in local universities for the 2008-09 academic year.

"We spent a summer in Kent, Ohio, playing shows and living on our own, relying on our live sound. Then we spent about two months in Cashiers, living with Drew's grandparents. That's where I wrote the song that would eventually make it into the top 20 of the BBC's Next Big Thing contest."

The BBC nominated "What You're Here" for 2007's "Next Big Thing." The song does not appear on King Tut's first full-length, *Chopping Wood & Trying Water*, but all of King Tut's songs are available for free download on the band's Reverbnation webpage. "We let people download over 55 songs on our site," Boyd said. "We haven't



Photos courtesy of King Tut

Above, King Tut performs at Charlotte's Milestone. Mark Boyd, left, and Drew Veres perform at Fred's Speak Easy in downtown Asheville.

made too much money, but giving our music away for free has helped us reach thousands of people that we'll probably never hear from."

While several recordings feature Boyd on vocals, King Tut plays instrumental live shows. An intense focus on guitar effects leaves little room for singing, according to Boyd. "I already have to concentrate enough on my guitar pedals, I don't have time to sing. We have songs that have singing in them, but I have to record and re-record those parts to get them right."

"At the same time, I think instrumental music can take you places that lyrical music can't, simply because the language

keeps you rooted in reality," Boyd said.

Boyd said King Tut's guitar influences range from vocal-based electronica to instrumental post-rock. Boyd had an early admiration for such popular instrumental acts as Explosions in the Sky and Mogwai, but learned technique from folk artist Iron and Wine.

"The biggest influences for me as far as songwriting goes are Iron & Wine, The Books and Do Make Say Think," Boyd said. "Iron & Wine inspired me to play guitar in the first place and also got me fingerpicking, which is an integral part of our sound."

"I love the orchestration and calm intensity of The Books and hope to one

day add more vocal samples to our live shows."

Veres, 19, an A-B Tech student who plans to pursue a music technology degree at UNCA, has a great interest in jazz and the New York band Battles, who influenced King Tut's time signature range, according to Boyd.

Coupled with Veres' interest in math rock and jazz, the duo bridges many sub-genres within the indie rock style.

Although Veres was not a founding member, Boyd said he contributes an equal amount of songwriting on the band's more recent material. However, King Tut's musical communication is minimal, both on stage and in the songwriting process.

"In the past, Drew would write drum parts to already existing guitar parts. Now, Drew gives me advice sometimes as to what specific melody I should be playing," Boyd said.

"Our communication while we're playing generally extends to 'keep going on this part,' 'next time around play the new part' and 'what the fuck was that?'"

Despite a solid student and local cult following, Boyd said he is not pleased with the Asheville music scene.

"Ken, the owner of the Rocket Club, has been one of the biggest and best supporters of our music as well as a friend," Boyd said. "But I'm not too impressed with the Asheville music scene. It's probably because UNCA students don't have a place to practice, and it's hard for the under-21 to play at venues around here."

"It's cool that so many people feel creative and have the initiative to play out, but a lot of them aren't doing anything original. I guess I expected Asheville to be more experimental rather than jam bandy and full of watered down indie rock," Boyd said.

King Tut has four Asheville concerts lined up until spring break. On Friday, King Tut headlines at West Asheville's Rocket Club with Vertigo Jazz Project, and on the following Friday, King Tut will play at Bobo Gallery on Lexington Ave.

Asheville's crowd at local venues is supportive, according to Boyd.

"It's nice to have a vote of confidence from your friends and total strangers," Boyd said. "On Feb. 19, we're playing at Stella Blue downtown, and there'll be 50-cent PBRs."