

Cletus Baltimore and the runaway sound

How one band's music became Brevard

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Any band can tell you about that one great moment on stage: a pluck of the guitar, roll of the drums, a smooth bass run, and *click!* No one knows how, but everything just works. It's instants like these that make live music. And this is how, in just two years, the easy-rolling jam-rock tunes of Cletus Baltimore have become the sound of Brevard.

"We'll just hit it off in a show at this one moment and say, 'Man I've never done that before'," says frontman Randy Hope, whose spicy guitar work evokes a blend of Jimi Hendrix and Trey Anastasio. "It's not just us," bassist Dave Griswold adds, "everybody knows about that one moment. You'll hit something and everybody will just look at you and say, 'That was right'."

Since meeting as freshmen in 2002, Hope and Griswold have turned this once nameless acoustic duo into a college town favorite. Throw in the free jazz influences of drummer Shane Parreco, who joined the two after jamming at a party in early 2004, and you've got Cletus Baltimore, a vibrant band whose



photo by Ben Clark

name is built on their fresh live performances.

Now a regular act at restaurants and bars like Jordan Street Café, not to mention nearly every significant social gathering off campus, the trio has come a long way from their time jamming in tattered dorms and body-hug-ging bedrooms.

"Every time they would come over to my house it was like I had to pick up the bed and stand it in the corner to make enough room for us to be able to play," says Parreco, whose primary influence, he says, comes from his teacher of two years Jeff Sipe, the drummer for the former Grateful Dead bassist Phil Lesh. "It just kinda developed out of that and sooner or later they'd come over to jam and people would come with them and then more people and it would get kinda crowded."

The band's first official gig came in the spring of 2004 at a late-night Relay for Life benefit concert on campus. "I remember it just being freezing cold," Griswold recalls. "We had a lot of people that actually came out and that was really cool."

From there, the band could be found almost every weekend at the one spot where "lively music," as their flyers suggest, should be played: the college party. This scene, according to Hope, gives the band the opportunity to experiment by taking their music as far as "the energy of the night" will allow. And that, according to Parreco, is what separates Cletus Baltimore from the rest.

"It will go from a straight up country tune and we'll just shift gears in the middle of it and it will sound like a disco tune," Parreco says. "It always ends up at a gig that we would play a tune and then all of a sudden another tune would just pop up out of that...and out the window goes the set list."



Cletus Baltimore at Jordan Street

photo by Ben Clark

By recording every practice session, the band has released three CD's in the past two years, with one more disc expected out before the end of the semester. The songs are mostly written by Hope, although each member has collaborated on at least one song.

"Ninety percent of the time the music is written first and then the lyrics," Hope says. "So the structure of the music has an effect on the lyrics, whether they are dark and gloomy, or bright and shiny...I write from experience, although not all songs are from my experience, but I don't approach a song and want to make it a song about love. It's really a matter of what is going on at that time."

While Cletus Baltimore has a long list of covers, including crowd favorites like Talking Heads "Psycho Killer" and The Band's "The Weight," their original tunes, which accumulate to well over 25, are what really make a show great, according to Griswold.

"When you can get something that you've come up with, something made from scratch," Griswold says, "and you build that up into something and you look out and what you've written or what we've done as a band you see people dancing to, it's pretty crazy...that's what I get

off on is the original stuff."

With no immediate plans for the future, Hope, Griswold, and Parreco have agreed that they will be around at least until December. "I think this coming semester, and possibly after that, we're going to start branching out into Asheville and Greenville just to try to get some gigs and expand our circle of where we play," Parreco says. "Right now we are just trying to focus on school. This is just our creative outlet in the meantime."

Whether this circle expands or not, most students are sure about one thing: as long as these three guys keep playing, as long as the crowd keeps dancing, and as long as the band keeps hitting that one great moment on stage, Cletus Baltimore will continue to be the lively, jam roots sound of Brevard.

Upcoming Shows:

- 4/22 BC Springfest
- 4/27 Jordan Street Cafe
- 5/2 Porter Center Amphitheater