

Rollins Lends Voice to Cradle Spencer's Blues Explode on Stage

By WILL KIMMEY
Arts & Diversions Editor

Henry Rollins captures the essence of a true Renaissance man.

Since 1984, he has produced nine records, published 11 books, fronted and toured with both Black Flag and The Rollins Band, played roles in eight films and done voice-overs for Ford Motor Company advertisements.

These diverse undertakings allow Rollins the opportunity to travel to new places and meet new people he never imagined, he said.

"One should get out and do stuff while you still have sap in your bones," he said. "There are a lot of ways to go through life in a mediocre (or) standard way. The way I see it, you only get one shot."

Even with all of these projects, Rollins maintains another hobby in a less traditional genre in the entertainment world: spoken word.

Rollins has released nine spoken word discs this decade; his most recent effort, *Think Tank*, hit stores Sept. 22. Rollins said he found the realm of spoken word "very difficult," yet still enjoyable.

"It's a fun way of expressing yourself," he said.

Rollins cherishes the opportunity to serve as a storyteller and to communicate without being constrained by a backing band, he said. In doing this, he can avoid repetition of choruses and verses that come with singing and doesn't have to battle with the amps to be heard, he said.

With spoken word, Rollins said he felt more of a connection to the audience.

"There's more direct communication - I am talking to you," he said.

Rollins strives not to stick to a certain image and not to be pigeonholed as one type of act. He said he liked to be himself on stage, skirting the phony image other performers often hold.

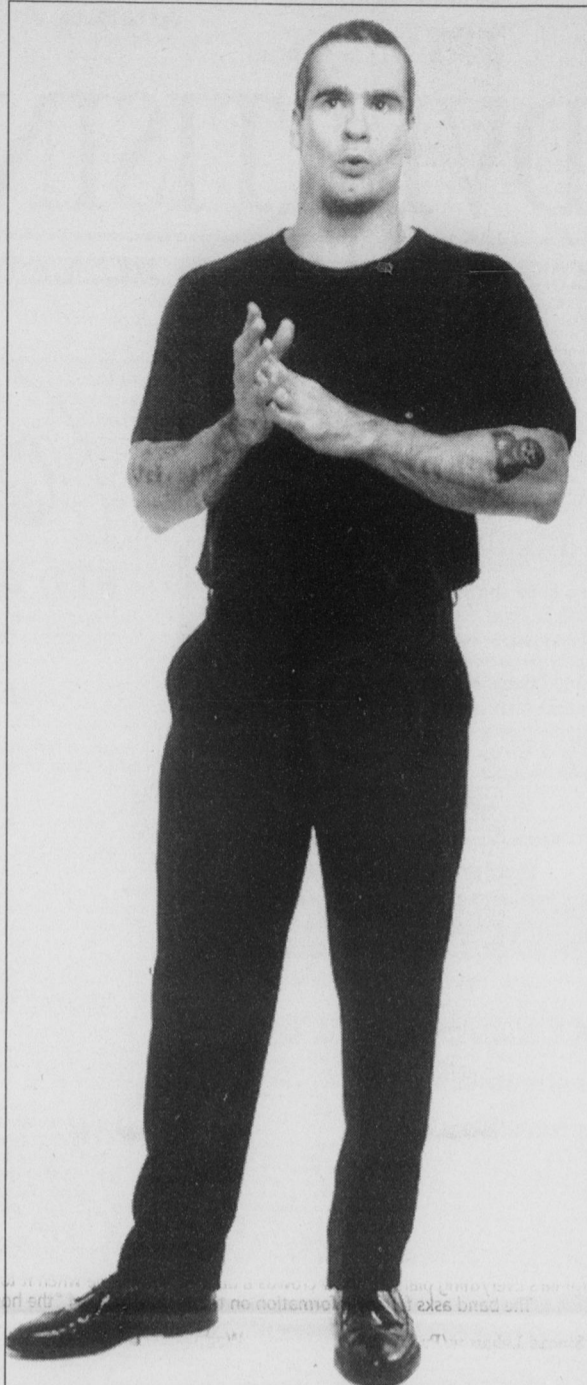
"It's safe to be one image, but that doesn't interest me," he said. It's more honest not to.

"Musicians have a (phony) image and ride behind it," he said. "It's hilarious. If Rob Zombie went out (on stage) without make-up and all his Rob Zombie stuff, people would be let down."

Instead, Rollins favors the style of Bob Dylan. "He just shows up in his T-shirt and jeans and plays," he said.

Rollins, a 17-year veteran of the entertainment industry, realizes that like Dylan, he too serves as an influential figure in the entertainment field. But rather than be content with the indirect influence he exerts on audiences through music, film and print, Rollins said he enjoyed the medium of spoken word because he could make the audience think while entertaining it.

"I'm at an age now where when I go to colleges, I am older than everyone in the crowd except maybe the custodian," he said. "There's something I can say that will be good food for thought ... something for them to argue about on the way home. Even if they think, 'man,



Henry Rollins wears many hats: singer, writer, publisher and actor. He will give a spoken word performance at Cat's Cradle on Sunday.

that's bullshit, I still made them think." College students need to do more thinking, Rollins said. He said education was wasted on a lot of students who were "narcoleptic, and not cataleptic, but just so laid back." He cannot understand why 20-year-olds with bodies so full of energy could have such little motivation.

"Some of the dumbest people I've met are college students," he said. "Sometimes they are the most complacent, lethargic people I meet."

When Henry Rollins takes the Cat's

Cradle stage for a spoken word performance on Sunday he said he hoped to see a packed house. Maybe even some of those lethargic college students will cough up the \$12 and show up.

"It's either me or your dorm room," he said. "It's either me or not me. I don't come to Chapel Hill that often. I am definitely worth two hours of your life. 'If not, I'll be lonely.'"

The Diversions Editors can be reached at artsdesk@unc.edu.

If anyone was ever a rock god, Jon Spencer is. Strutting across the stage in tight black pants and a half-open shirt at Cat's Cradle, he played as if possessed by manic, oversexed demons.

New York City's Jon Spencer Blues Explosion, composed of the dynamic Spencer, guitar prodigy Judah Bauer and drum whiz Russell Simins, continued their tradition of blues-influenced rock with the recent release *Acme*.

A California band, Countdown, opened the show with a set notable only for the singer's ability to drink a bottle of beer and simultaneously play the guitar.

Things kicked into gear when Countdown introduced someone they called, "The only black man in South Dakota." An impeccably dressed, 60-ish

man, Andre Williams, swaggered onstage and proceeded to seduce the audience with a sexually explicit blend of rock and soul. Williams, famous for his R&B work in the '50s and '60s, served as *Acme's* executive producer.

When the Blues Explosion took the stage, the sexual energy simply oozed. With shiny shirts on all three band members, their sweat dripping after mere minutes and the innate sexuality of their down-and-dirty rock, you couldn't really blame the girls dancing provocatively in front of the stage.

Simins appeared unenergetic, almost on the verge of passing out, but still managed to keep the pace. Bauer, hiding behind a mask of shaggy hair, remained coolly detached. Only occasionally did he punctuate his frenetic guitarwork with jumps or side shuffles.

Spencer, meanwhile, wailed on guitar, leaping, howling, falling to his knees, pretending to taunt the theremin and striking all the classic rock-star postures. In their hour and 15 minute set, the

baseless Blues Explosion wailed their way through almost half of *Acme's* songs. Songs from *Now I Got Worry* dominated the rest of the set, mixed in with a few tunes from earlier releases.

If you came to rock, then you probably got what you paid for. If you came to be a rock, as much of the audience seemed to be doing, you might not have had such a good time.

Yet this apathy can't be blamed on the audience's too-hip-to-dance mentality. Despite the energy and excellent sound of the show, the performers did not connect with the audience. Spencer seemed too cool, too unresponsive.

Regardless, the Blues Explosion is, simply, a bad-ass band. They've got the talent, the brooding good looks and the attitude. Maybe they have a little too much attitude, but if you just submit yourself to Spencer and his rock whims, it's still a heck of a show.

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Playing It Cool, Ice Rouses Audience

Cat's Cradle witnessed a capacity crowd Saturday night, but the audience wasn't teeming with frenzied anticipation for the performance of some buzz-worthy underground heroes.

No, the sell-out draw was none other than a world-wide joke punchline - one-hit wonder poster boy Vanilla Ice. Funniest of all, almost no one went home disappointed.

Vanilla Ice embodies the did-we-really-used-to-listen-to-that icon that VH1's Behind the Music was invented to forgivingly portray. Nonetheless, he refuses to allow his blip on pop culture's radar to mercifully vanish.

Instead, Vanilla reconfigured himself as a hardcore skate-rocker for the release of the critically-mocked *Hard to Swallow*. He then embarked on a nationwide tour that seemed tailor-made to

afford every smartass in America the opportunity to deliver their own pithy disses directly to the Iceman.

But when the former Robert Van Winkle brought his comedy routine to the Cradle, snickering soon gave way to rock 'n roll raucousness. Knowing well that getting laid and smoking blunts are subject matter that transcend any former teen-idol status, Vanilla thoughtfully populated his interchangeable songs with repeated references to both.

After Vanilla had adequately informed the ladies of the culinary delights found in his "vanilla ice cream," the Iceman began his self-described "trip to the old school" with a medley of *To the Extreme* favorites.

That was merely a prelude to the showstopper "Too Cold," better known as "Ice Ice Baby" with power chords.

Leading the audience in a fist-pumping version of everyone's fifth-grade mix tape favorite, Vanilla sadly omitted the classic second verse (featuring such gems as "girls were hot wearin' less than

bikinis/Rockman lovers driving Lamborghinis"), but still cooked emcees "like a pound of bacon" as though the last eight years never happened.

Unsurprisingly, many flocked for the exits as soon as Vanilla finished killing their brains like a poisonous mushroom.

Those that remained were treated to the equivalent of a really live house party that just happened to be emceed by the man responsible for the biggest-selling rap album of all time.

Vanilla Ice made no attempt to stress his legitimacy and never referred to himself as an artist. Far from pleading that he was "for real this time," Vanilla seemed to know that a simple chant of "Chapel Hill baby" goes a lot farther than any blind stab at credibility.

The crowd needed some cool tunes, and not just any would suffice. They couldn't get Ice Cube. Thankfully, they got Vanilla Ice.

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Chapel Hill's Sankofa Pleases Crowd

Sankofa knows how to throw a party. The band brought DJs, emcees and poets from the Triangle together to support Lyricist Lounge at Local 506 on Saturday.

With the club packed, the night began with a DJ spin-off that featured great local talent. Four at a time, DJs cut, mixed and scratched some of the hottest beats around.

Before the emcee competition, Sankofa gave the audience a taste of its brand of funk- and jazz-inspired hip hop by performing a tribute to the Tar Heel state entitled "North Cack."

The emcee competition featured

promising amateurs with the gift of gab and local groups that included Iyfu Dynasty, Crimson Guard and Somebody Manifest.

The crowd had the final word on who rocked the mic and who didn't. The crowd became more vocal as the show went progressed.

After the club's microphones had been given a thorough workout, Sankofa took the stage to record the live tracks for the next CD. Among the songs they recorded were "Wanna Be Down," "Get Hype," "Burgundy Mist," "Feel The Vibe" and "Invisible Man."

Sankofa's beats and hooks sounded like the Beastie Boys' jazzier instrumental songs. Cream MC's style are reminiscent of early Outkast. DJ Pez, who

has gained exposure in Chapel Hill's clubs, rounds out the Sankofa team with dead-on mixing.

As Sankofa laid down the funk, everybody started dancing, grooving and shouting, which was obviously what the crowd wanted.

To top off a great night, the band convinced Local 506's management to amend their usually strict 21-and-over policy and admit anyone over 18 with the appropriate stamp on their hand.

With a solid instrumental section, Cream MC's unquestionable emcee skills and a great DJ, a Sankofa party is a sure bet to make your booty shake.

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