

Local bands have plenty of guts, little glory

By TOM WEBER

The guitar player scratches out a catchy rhythm and the Springfest crowd perks up. The drums and bass jump in to fill the bottom and the crowd starts thumping as the vocalist rips into George Thorogood's "Move it on Over." Nick Fear is at it again.

Nick Fear, a five-man band, is one of several student rock groups on campus. How many there actually are is hard to determine because of the transient, loosely formed nature of most of the bands. Group leaders say there are some bands that are unrecognized because they play for personal pleasure and do not go public.

Sophomore Nick Searcy, leader of Nick Fear, said that Springfest was only the sixth gig his band had played together. With the end of the school year, the band may have to split up.

"None of us has the time to make it a full-time thing and go professional," Searcy said. "we never really approached it from a money-making point of view. We feel we have something to share...we went out with the attitude that we wanted to play a lot and we'd play wherever we could."

Campus groups vary widely in their approach to music and audiences. Nick Fear relies heavily on Searcy's fine voice and sense of humor when on stage. Nightflyer, a seven-member band, molds its soft-rock blend of guitars and keyboards around female vocalist E.C. Whitner's interpretations. The Slam, a driving '60s and New Wave group, treats its music differently.

"We never approach our music objectively," said guitarist Dave Bullock. "We play better in proportion to the number of beers we've consumed."

Most campus groups are relatively newly formed and were created spontaneously through old musical relationships and new campus contacts.

"Some of the members of the band had been together a couple of years," Scott Macdonald of Nightflyer said. "We decided to get a bass player and drummer, and in January we all got together. We played at The Station (in Carrboro) Feb. 15 and March 31."

Nick Fear started as Nick Searcy and the Three Day Band. After a couple of appearances in the Pit, the band reformed as Nick Fear to play "performance oriented rock 'n' roll," according to Searcy. Their first date was at the Henderson Residence College All-Nighter last semester.

If the groups have different musical backgrounds and approaches, they face many of the same problems. Because members have conflicting schedules and limited spare time, student bands often have trouble forming a satisfactory practice schedule.

"We've been pretty lucky in that we all have Tuesday and Thursday afternoons free," Searcy said. "I'd like to practice three or four times a week, but we can't."

"(Being a student performer) is definitely a disadvantage," said Paul Cole of The Slam. "I've got school and another job. There are so many things competing for your time."

The Slam has scheduling difficulties and at first couldn't find a place to practice.

"One of the biggest problems we had was finding a place we could play without people complaining about the sound," Cole said. "We used to practice in a University facility, but we found out it was illegal and we sort of got thrown out." The Slam now practices at Cole's house in Carrboro.

Although Nightflyer has space to practice in guitarist Keith Macdonald's living room, the group is dogged by a shortage of equipment.

"We've been asked to play several dates that we couldn't because of equipment shortages," Scott Macdonald said. "I play acoustic piano...and since The Station has one, that's one reason we could play there. I could play electric piano, but they cost \$1,000." Nick Fear and Nightflyer had to combine their equipment for the Springfest date last weekend to create an adequate outdoor sound system, Macdonald said.



Local rock acts like Nightflyer (above) and Nick Fear thrive on support from area music lovers.

DTH/Jay Hyman



Lack of time and equipment make it difficult for bands to travel to shows.

"We play a lot of parties and fraternity houses," said Cole, "but we're getting more into the bar and club scene." Cole said that it is fairly difficult for a student band to get engagements at clubs.

Scott Macdonald admitted that it is frustrating trying to break out of anonymity. Much of the crowd at Nightflyer's first appearance at The Station was friends the band had asked to come, he said.

"One of the reasons we got the gig at The Station was because my brother knew one of the managers," Macdonald said.

Despite the adversities the bands seem to have a good time. Slam member Coleman recollected one particularly rowdy gig they played.

"Everyone was extremely drunk and people in the audience were spilling beer and falling on the equipment. Just as we were about to start another song, three British exchange students got up on stage and asked if they could sing "Rule Britannia." We had to sort of hold them up and point them towards the mikes. They were still singing when we hauled them off."

One Slam fan recalls pogoing at a party where the group was playing. "Everybody was jumping up and down and the floor was bouncing up and down," the student said. "It was the first time I ever danced with the floor."

Both Paul Cole and Nick Searcy hope to make careers out of their music. Nightflyer hopes to write enough original material this summer to send a demonstration tape to a recording company soon, Macdonald said. But for now, the student musicians will have to bide their time.

"We enjoy playing and we're having a lot of fun," Searcy said. "And we're getting better every time we play."

Tom Weber is a staff writer for The Daily Tar Heel.

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