

—Cover Story—



DTH/Tony Deifell

The Chuck Davis African-American Dance Ensemble creates sounds of African folk songs as part of the Southern Accents Festival

Dash Rip Rock — songs of the South

By CHRIS CAIN
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There was a time when Southern Rock 'n' Roll meant Lynyrd Skynyrd, Molly Hatchet, maybe the Allman Brothers.

But times they are a changin' in ways Mr. Dylan might appreciate, and a different sound is coming from below the Mason-Dixon line. "It's the new Southern sound," says Bill Davis of the New Orleans band Dash Rip Rock. "(It's) heavy on what's called clean guitar, jangly guitar."

Davis and his group, along with Love Tractor and Guadalcanal Dairy, will bring their spotless, jangling guitars to the Great Hall on Friday afternoon for a performance. The band is playing in Chapel Hill courtesy of the "Southern Accents" Fine Arts Festival, and it is therefore no mistake that all three bands hail from the South.

The new sound of the South, more pop-rock than anything done by the likes of ZZ-Top, has been made nationally and internationally popular by bands such as REM and Jason and the Scorchers. Many of today's critics have praised Southern bands who draw on folk or blues roots to create a danceable pop music

that has caught on in Yankeeland as well as Dixie. All three groups playing the Great Hall have made tours throughout the United States.

John Poe, drummer for Guadalcanal Dairy, sees one main theme running throughout the new Southern music: "It's played with a real kick-up-your-heels style It calls you to jump up, hoot and holler, turn out the big jar with the XXX."

The Southern bands started out by playing for parties instead of in clubs or bars. This tends to create what Glenn Chitlick, manager of the Athens, Georgia band Love Tractor, calls "front porch music" with a real Southern feel.

"All the bands started playing parties," he says. "Athens is a Southern town and most houses have front or back porches which they play from. People are playing live music and making people happy."

Chitlick emphasizes that all the members of Love Tractor grew up in the South, either in Richmond, Va. or Athens. "Geography has more to do with it than anything else. They are Southern."

Poe says the same for Guadalcanal Dairy: "Number one, we certainly consider ourselves a Southern band

because we were all born and raised here." The band members, with the exception of Poe, are from Marietta, Ga., and are now based in Athens. "Something about the humidity and bugs that sort of gets to us," he says slowly, taking a break from a sweaty morning of chain-sawing in the backyard.

Members of Dash Rip Rock grew up in New Orleans and therefore see themselves as different from their Georgia and North Carolina neighbors. Says lead guitarist Bill Davis: "We're not only Southern, we're New Orleans . . . we're Deep South. We try to set ourselves apart; we're down here on the Gulf Coast and it's a world apart down here." He sees the group's music as inseparable from the Louisiana Bayou, where the band began. "We call it a mixture of swamp rock and swampy blues," he said.

New Orleans lies equidistant from Georgia and Texas, and Davis says Dash Rip Rock received influences from Athens to Austin. The group combines the new pop sounds he sees as coming out of Athens bands such as REM and Guadalcanal Dairy with the straight-ahead rockability of Austin's

Dash's first album, "Dash Rip Rock" ("We'll get creative later," says Davis), was released this week, and on it are specifically Southern lyrics. "We relate with the Southern thing by writing lyrics which are ethereal . . . we relate back to Creedence Clearwater Revival — the mysteries, the swamp," Davis says. He describes it as "Southern mystic." Many of the band's lyrics are also based on Southern literature, he says.

Poe says he and the other members of Guadalcanal Dairy are big fans of Southern writers. Their lyrics are often influenced by such writers as Flannery O' Connor and Eudora Welty. There are certain Southern themes he sees as unavoidable for anyone growing up in the South, as the band members did. Two members, in fact, grew up "in the shadow of Kennesaw Mountain," the site of a famous Civil War battle. "Half the town is Civil War monuments and cemeteries. They've grown up with it in their blood," Poe says.

Songs such as "Pray for Rain" and "Fear of God" on Guadalcanal Dairy's most recent album ("Jambo-ree") reveal another aspect of life in the South — religion. "It's inescap-

able in the Southern Bible Belt," Poe says. "The fear of God is instilled in us all. I have a neighbor who apologizes to me for hanging out her laundry on Sunday."

Love Tractor began its career by playing tunes without lyrics and, says manager Chitlick, "once they got comfortable playing together they started singing." Their new album, "This Ain't No Outerspace Ship," includes only two instrumental pieces. The band sings upteat songs, such as a remake of the Gap Band's "Party Train," along with some that have a certain Southern flavor, such as "Small Town" or "Outside the Big Star."

Words are perhaps not Love Tractor's forte, however, and Chitlick says he believes the "Southern Rock" classification may be unrealistic. "With communication and radio and TV regional things aren't regional anymore," he says.

"Southern Rock is a bastardized term," he adds. "Not too long ago it meant Molly Hatchet. Now when you put REM, Love Tractor, the Connells up there it just doesn't fit."

"But the fact is, we are Southern Rock: We're rock and roll and we're Southern, and that's the way it is."