

*Bands*

# From theater to concerts, this band's ramblin' on

By **KAREN ZIMMER**  
Staff Writer

In 1975 the Red Clay Ramblers each took a leave of absence for a month to tour their musical "Diamond Studs." The show was a hit; it went to New York . . . and one month became 13 years.

"We called home at the time and said, 'Look, we're not coming back,'" veteran band member Tommy Thompson says. "That's how we became a full-time band, through theater."

Now they've come to Chapel Hill to perform at ArtsCenter this Saturday night.

The influence of drama remains in the group's performances. "We like treating a concert as theater," Thompson says. "A singer is like an actor. The audience has to be convinced that the voice it hears means what it says."

For Thompson, theatricality also lies in just moving around on stage, changing instruments (of which the band has 12), talking to the public and exposing songs in a humorous way.

Humor is the key to the

Ramblers' art; it's inherent in the "old timey" roots of the band's songs. Their style is inspired from traditional American music. "What makes this music unique is its combination of African and European culture," Thompson says.

The Ramblers' loose-jointed fun is largely due to the "Afro-genes," which it inherited. The Euro-African blend is exemplified by the use of the banjo, originally an African instrument, in harmony with the European fiddle, which settlers could easily carry around because of its small size.

The band does not only blend geographical styles. It also picks up tunes from different periods and throws them together to form a new whole.

Although the Ramblers started as a revivalist band, imitating a 1930s style, the band soon changed its course. "In the mid-70s, we realized that the revivalist label was a prison," Thompson says. "We began to swap things around and mix kinds of music, being irreverent to the sacred past." They blend country, blues,

jazz and rock. They use classic instruments such as acoustic guitar and mandolin along with a synthesizer and a digital piano.

Although they have been called "the nation's premier whatzit band," the Ramblers have always kept a definite personality by holding on to their old-time flavor throughout their innovations.

Actor/director/playwright Sam Shepard was attracted to the Ramblers' purely American backbone. Shepard asked them to compose and perform for his theater production, "A Lie of the Mind," and his upcoming movie, "Far North," after he heard them on the radio.

Shepard must have been lucky, because the Ramblers are rarely on the air. "Our music is not of the type you hear on commercial radio," Thompson says.

It may be of the type you want to get better acquainted with, though: according to Thompson, his group's music just makes you feel good. "We're entertaining, we're fun. And that is not just an



The Red Clay Ramblers will perform at ArtsCenter Saturday night

illusion in my head. Wherever we go and there is a crowd, people like us," he says.

Maybe because, as he puts it, a good performance is "like the best conversation you've ever had."

# It's a rerun on 'Miami Vice' — but don't miss Sean as James Bond

By **JENNY LIVINGSTON**  
Assistant Omnibus Editor

Okay you guys, it's time to get out of that damaging sun. Stop tiring yourself out with all that Frisbee golf. Go home. Go inside.

Spring is a very lonely time for your poor TV. All day long it waits for you, sitting silently in your living room while you're out there giving yourself skin cancer and leg cramps. Give your tube a break this week. Give back some of what it gives to you. Appreciate your television!

This message was brought to you as a public service by the Committee to Restore Interest in the Boobtube (CRIB).

**Thursday**

Big shakeup at NBC. "My Two Dads" leaves its Sunday slot to take the place of the the fashion show-slash-comedy "A Different World" at 8:30 p.m. on Thursday. Once again, the networks show us that a man trying to run a household is funny, and two men trying to run one — well, you have to see it to believe it.

**Friday**

And they said it couldn't be done. After five sequels to "Friday the 13th," Fox turned that blood-and-breasts extravaganza into a weekly event on the small screen. Don't worry, though, it's nothing like the movie.

If unshaven men who wear white pants all year round are more your style, you can tune to "Miami Vice" on NBC. It's a repeat



of the episode in which Don Johnson marries Sheena Easton. She just hasn't been herself since she started hanging around Prince. And he hasn't been himself since he started hanging around Barbra Streisand.

**Saturday**

I'm sick and tired of everybody saying, "Cartoons today (sigh) — what ever happened to Bugs Bunny and the Roadrunner and Tom and Jerry?" Come off it! Today we have Smurfs, Pound Puppies, baby Muppets, even "Disney's Adventures of the Gummi Bears." When else were there ever Saturday morning cartoons modeled after food? We should all just count our blessings.

**Sunday**

Never say never again. "From Russia with Love" airs for the eighth time on ABC. But with Sean Connery as Bond plus the car chases plus all the groovy 1963 fashions, it's a classic that never (excuse me — hardly ever) grows old.

Following the movie, ABC jumps on the Just Say No bandwagon

with its news special "Drugs: A Plague Upon the Land." A plague, they say? At least it's not frogs.

**Monday**

Oscar night! The suspense is killing people. The question on everyone's lips is: "How long will the ordeal last this year?" Tune in and see if you can figure out why the winners for Best Editing of an Animated Foreign Short Film always give longer speeches than the Best Actor.

To gear up for the awards, watch "European Vacation" on CBS. After watching Chevy Chase and his goony family for an hour or so, you'll be ready for anything.

**Tuesday**

Ever since "Happy Days" and "Laverne and Shirley" went off the air, Tuesday's been a real bore. So get your viewing hours in early by watching as many game shows as you can. For fun, try rating the hosts, models and guests on attractiveness and personality. Then try to answer the following questions: Who's a better dresser, Bob Barker or Alex Trebek? Where do they get these contestants? And whatever happened to Monty Hall?

**Wednesday**

ABC airs its own new Yuppie fest, "Heartbeat," in which women doctors who look like fashion models treat (sensitively, of course) patients who look like character actors. Sounds dull, but there should be a lot of Yuppie sex in it. Like I said, it sounds dull.

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