

Music

Student band soars with popular covers, some new originals

By DAWN GIBSON
Staff Writer

Imagine turning on your radio and hearing the familiar tunes of a local band that has performed at many of Chapel Hill's nightclubs. That's exactly what the members of the Highlanders have been able to do.

Since October 1987, this band of four UNC students has performed many popular tunes in local areas such as Granville Towers, He's Not Here, the Cat's Cradle and fraternity courtyards. The band has also had some of its original tunes played on WXYC.

The band made a promotional tape of tunes made popular by other artists, said lead singer Jamie Block, 20. In the fall, the Highlanders will record some of their own tunes to send to college radio stations across the country, he said.

"We're really looking forward to

this fall," Block said. "We're looking to expand, and we want to send the radio stations something of quality level."

The band plays a range of music from blues to progressive folk and the Beatles to U2, said bass player John Szczypinski, 21.

"It's really hard to say what type of music we play," Szczypinski said. "We're really a cover band right now. Whatever anybody wants to hear, we'll play."

The other band members — lead guitarist John Schultz, 19, and drummer David Wenda, 19 — will join Block and Szczypinski in Chapel Hill in June and July to continue playing locally and in other parts of the state, Szczypinski said.

In August, the band plans to go to Long Island for a 10-day tour.

"It's going to be a really exciting road trip," Block said.



Local student band, the Highlanders

Love Tractor pulls catchy pop tunes together on stage

Anyone who has ever heard a Love Tractor album must realize that the band's recordings are not the most exciting fare on vinyl. From their all-instrumental debut *Love Tractor* to the tighter pop sound of *This Ain't No Oterspace Ship*, on which the band finally found its voice, the emphasis has almost always been on an easy, melodic, almost pastoral feel. Although this may make for some genuinely pleasant listening, it does not hint very well at the band's capabilities on stage.

After eight years of slugging through the club circuit away from its hometown of Athens, Ga., the band's stage act has evolved into a highly entertaining synthesis of guitar, paisley pop, surf sound and even white funk. This is strongly supported by vocals that have matured so well that they are now better live than on the last studio

Robert Genadio Concert

release.

Love Tractor's set last Thursday at Cat's Cradle started out, predictably enough, with an instrumental, but the band chose its best ever, guitarist Mike Richmond's "Fun to Be Happy," the outstanding cut off its first album.

Using two slow, bright notes as a springboard, Richmond's catchy, meandering leads reveal more of a debt to early Tom Verlaine than to the Ventures, the group with whom the band's instrumentals are frequently compared.

Less accomplished instrumentals played during the evening featured a predominantly surf-oriented sound,

with only the more recent "Rudolf Nureyev" distinguishing itself from the other songs in its simple beauty.

These instrumentals were well spaced, almost serving as transitional passages between the songs with vocals. However, there were a few too many instrumentals, which often left the audience in polite anticipation of vocalizing.

Richmond was not born with the most remarkable singing voice, which is undoubtably why it had remained unrevealed for so long. But he makes up for it with a strong vocal dexterity, using it effectively to switch from the low tonal range to a high falsetto or vice versa for a surprisingly interesting pop flair.

This was very evident on "Beatle Boots," one of guitarist Mark Cline's more commercial songs, but some of the group's earlier songs (like a few vocalized attempts off the "Around

the Bend" album) were reworked using this effect to produce a lightly psychedelic touch.

Another vocal effect the band is fond of is the interjection "Woo!", which had its debut on the song "Greedy Dog" off the 'til the cows come home LP. Is it a dog bark? A cow call? Somehow, whatever it is, it works quite well, especially in concert.

Love Tractor's vocal effects alone could never have carried the show. What ultimately did was the group's understanding of its audience. By raising the tempo of most of its recorded work and adding a stronger beat, songs such as "Small Town" and "Outside with Ma" were transformed from the mediocre ballads they were recorded as into the excellent rock songs they really are.

Having used these songs to build up the crowd for the grand finale, Richmond relinquished the vocals to Cline, who launched into a long white soul number, resplendent with added brass and sung entirely in falsetto.

To end the show off, the energetic bugle player Lasta La Vie grabbed the microphone for an awful but

infectiously enjoyable cover of "Shattered."

Love Tractor proved Thursday night that they are talented enough and perceptive enough of their listeners to be able to make very interesting and engaging music, but whether or not they will do this on their next album remains to be seen.

Opening the concert was an even harder-working group — Chapel Hill's own Swamis, performing for the first time in its new line-up.

Having lost its bassist and their keyboard player, Swamis has slimmed down to a tight guitar band, with new member Nat Smith (joining from the Attitudes) jumping in on bass almost effortlessly and providing a powerful complement to drummer John Hanks.

The new sound was brought out in numbers like the forceful reworking of Swamis' own "Little Secrets" (the original recorded guitar break was by Parthenon Huxley), but the group's main strength was still firmly anchored in the songwriting abilities of guitarist/vocalists Holden Richards (formerly of One-Plus-Two) and Paul "Is King" Price, most notably with Richards' "Sign of the Times" and Price's debut of "In the Eyes of Buddha."



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