

Music

Wild 'n' Woolly Band helps celebrate Boogie's birthday

The Zone, a Durham nightclub that has been almost completely overlooked by area press, has long had the reputation of being a violent bikers' club. The bikers are still and will always be there, but co-owner/manager Tommy Knowles and his helpers have earned themselves the respect of the club's patrons in just about a year, and that respect has kept the violence far in the past.

Knowing the press would never bother to check, the Zone billed Sunday night as a concert with the band "Boogie's Birthday." But the event turned out to be a birthday party for a biker called Boogie, and the entertainment was provided by an intermixing of veteran musicians making up Lee Dunham and Friends and The One and Only Wild 'n' Woolly Band.

After a suspenseful delay caused by the power outage that hit much of Durham after Sunday's storm, the cavernous candlelit club suddenly surged with energy as bright lights flicked back on, video games returned to life and Dunham plugged in on one of the most spacious and best equipped stages in town.

Although he has a long and varied musical history that includes sessions with various rockers in the 1950s, being a member of John John and the Rayvons when they had their novelty hit "I'm a Nut" in the '60s, recording at Bill Porter's studio in Las Vegas and performing with Danny Joe Reagan in and outside of the group Tumbleweed, Dunham's sets Sunday were strictly country rock.

With bassist James Brown and the Wild 'n' Woolly Band's own Phillip Pearson on drums providing a tight back-up, Dunham's fine vocals enriched such classics as Merle Haggard's "Big City." Throughout the performance, Dunham worked his Fender flawlessly over sharp country riffs, slowing down only for his emotional fill-ins on "Folsom

Robert Genadio Concert

Prison Blues" as Brown held a more subtle bass line than the one on Johnny Cash's original.

It was soon the Wild 'n' Woolly's turn to wish Boogie happy birthday. Despite the wealth of songwriters in the band and an upcoming album project of original material, the Wild 'n' Woolly's played all covers for the enthusiastic crowd, from blues and country standards to rock and country of the 1980s, all with the band's own brand of searing honky-tonk rock 'n' roll.

This is the kind of music that Mick Jagger and Keith Richards always bled over, that Pete Townshend and Mick Ralphs always wished someone would let them play. Those bands playing under the New Sensitivity banner would do well to discover what is real hard-boozing rock 'n' roll if they truly want to represent the South.

Tommy Knowles left the club in the hands of a fellow named "Sheep-dawg" and played lead as rhythm guitarist Van Wood sang the opening number, "The Barmaid Downstairs," to the audience's whoops of support. Tommy took over the vocals, backed

up by his wife, Tara, on "Truck Driving Man," while pitting his leads against the rhythm interplay of Wood and Phillip Pearson, who had switched from his drums to guitar. Behind the three guitarists, drummer John Oakley and bassist Brett Herndon held what might otherwise have fallen apart steadily intact.

Most of the rest of the set featured Tommy and Tara singing lead vocals together, Tara trailing her hands in the air and swaying to the music as Tommy stared straight ahead through his shades. This strong double vocal proved most effective on such songs as Merle Haggard's "Mama Tried," "Friend of the Devil" and an upbeat version of "Six Days I've Been Rolling."

On "Trouble Bound," the two harmonized, with Tara shining on the high range, and later sang an excellent version of the old blues ballad "It Hurt Me, Too," with Tommy singing backing vocals.

Pearson also sang lead on several numbers. Although he was dressed more like a mainstream rock star than in the country and western style of the others, Pearson could let loose a nicely harsh blues voice reminiscent of Johnny Winter's, which he showcased best on "Whole Lot of Shakin'." On Hank Williams' "You Win Again," Pearson chewed gum, danced and adjusted his shades while still

belting out a vocal enlivened by effective half-pauses and colorful inflections.

When Herndon had trouble returning for the second set, Dunham hopped back on stage to cover for him, walking his bass with seasoned ease and singing a version of "Route 66" that was slow enough to truly highlight the pops from the Telecaster Tommy had strapped on. Herndon did make it back in time to join the power chord intro to the heavy "Fire Down Below," to which Boogie danced in appreciation.

The band encored with a long, uncompromisingly jagged medley which started with the Georgia Satellites' "Railroad Steel." Tommy's 10 years of experience with the band, plus experience as varied as hardcore groups to a hard rock project with former Safehouse and Enormous Boy

member Terry McInturff, came burning out as he piled on lead after lead as he, Pearson and Tara took the medley to a Dylan mix of "Highway 61" and "Maggie's Farm." The encore unfortunately had to end, and the band said good night.

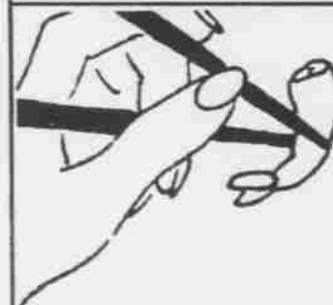
The Zone is a membership-only club, but almost any member would be glad to sponsor a new member provided that those interested are not interested in starting trouble, but genuinely desire to enjoy good music and beer and have a good time.

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