

New Potato Caboose rocks with old favorites

By ALLISON PIKE
Staff Writer

The New Potato Caboose has made waves up and down the East Coast with its repertoire of original and cover rock tunes. Saturday night the band will bring its danceable, harmonized sound to the ArtsCenter.

The New Potato Caboose is a D.C.-based band that formed four years ago. The band began by playing Grateful Dead cover tunes, but its style has developed into an original sound that combines a strong rhythm section with distinctive four-part harmonies. The band has recently put more emphasis on its original tunes, but still performs cover songs at its shows. Instead of copying songs, however, the band makes its own interpretations of songs by the Grateful Dead, Little Feat, Warren Zevon, and the Band.

"When we put the band together in college, the common ground we had musically was a selection of Grateful Dead tunes," guitarist Don Laux said. "It's how we copped a groove, but now it's become a whole lot more than a bunch of cover tunes. Our original music has become an important part of our show."

The Caboose lineup includes three guitarists, two drummers, a bassist and a keyboardist. Laux explained why the band contains so many members. "The size of the

band creates a lot of texture," he said. "It's a big sound but you have to be careful that you don't step on somebody's toes or get in the way of their licks. It's a musical challenge because you really have to listen."

"We are lucky we were friends before we became bandmates, so that makes it easier for us to get along with each other," he added.

The Caboose members are so well in tune with each other that they don't even compile a song list before each show. They discuss in between songs which ones to play next. This tactic allows the band to play a set that follows the mood of the audience.

"It sort of leaves it open to the moment," said Laux. "I mean, if you play a really ripping rocker and next on the set list you've got a slow tune, it just doesn't go over sometimes."

"We have a jazz approach to rock. Jazz is open-formatted, and we are too. If we decide to take an unplanned solo somewhere in a set, we just look at each other and take it. If we mess up, we mess up together and it sounds good."

The Caboose isn't new to the area. The band has played in Chapel Hill, Durham, Raleigh, Charlotte, Wilmington and Winston-Salem. Laux said the band's variety is a key to its popularity. "Our crowd



The New Potato Caboose brings its combination of original rock'n'roll and classic rock cover tunes for what promises to be a danceable show at the ArtsCenter Saturday night.

is really getting more diversified, especially in college towns," he said. "Our cover tunes are pretty varied, and our originals mix well. I should think people who are open-minded would really like the band."

The Caboose is hoping that

music scouts will like its sound, too. After four years in the business, the Caboose says it's ready to make an album.

"We're a band looking for a recording deal," Laux said. "We feel like our time has come. Not only is it the next logical step as a band,

but the way the music business is going. The musical environment is conducive to what we're doing — coming out with a new twist to a classic sound. Bands like the Georgia Satellites and the Bodeans are enjoying success by doing just that."

'Dear John' promises good first season, but can it last?

By WINSTON LLOYD
Staff Writer

Now that the election is over, and Bush has won, the fall schedule will no longer be inundated with annoying campaign commercials, so we can get on to more serious matters — like the new television season.

You come home from an important and tiring business trip, looking forward to your wife's smiling face and a glowing "welcome home." But you are greeted instead with a letter on the mantelpiece. It begins "Dear John." You don't immediately panic, after all, that is your name. The letter continues, and the panic sets in... and so does the theme song and some opening credits proclaiming "Dear John" and something like "In stereo where available."

In the tradition of "Three Men and a Cradle," here is another remake of a European product, but this one is from the English screen. Popular in the U.K., "Dear John" is brought to us by Ed Weinberger, of "WKRP" and "Cosby" fame. With Emmy-winning sitcom director James Burrows ("Cheers") also added to this impressive list, we should be able to expect some good comedy and serious character development with well-crafted, interesting plots each and every week,

without exception.

But I just don't see much potential with this situation. It's the common problem of a one-joke sitcom. The situation comedy relies on the main situation, whether it be surgeons in an Army hospital, a blue collar family with a bigoted father, or the conflict of old and new in a Cincinnati radio station. But how far can you take a jilted, lonely guy in a singles encounter group? Sure, "The Beverly Hillbillies" had but one joke — that of displaced bumpkins — and "ALF" is doing well, too. I can even see some laughs here, but within a year or two the producers are going to have to develop John into someone who has accepted his new single life and no longer feels sorry for himself. Can they do it, and can the show still be titled "Dear John?"

This raises another problem in the casting of Judd "Taxi" Hirsch as John Lacey. A likable guy, but utterly miserable. He is perfect as the destroyed ex-husband who really doesn't seem to fit in with any particular type of person, but will he ever be able to get over his troubles and look satisfied... with anything? John seems to be quite one-dimensional, a nice man who has been screwed in life. But he's not the only one-sided character. There's the even more

miserable geek, Ralph, whose Bulgarian wife disappeared during the wedding reception; the sexually obsessed group leader, Louise, whose voice may annoy you almost as much as Roseanne Barr's; the perfect counterpart to John, a straight-laced, intelligent, kind woman named Kate; and then who will probably be the character to whom the show may eventually have to shift, Kirk. Kirk (Jere Burns) is a one-dimensional, uncaring, S.O.B. But so was Archie Bunker, and Alex Keaton to some extent. Alex wasn't the original center of "Family Ties," but his character was the most interesting to develop. Seeing an openly callous character and gradually discovering his human side, as may be done with Kirk, is more fun than seeing the consummate protagonist and center of pity, John, turn dislikable. Archie became likable, Alex is a decent guy, and Sam Malone isn't the chauvinist he wants the guys at the bar to believe.

Kirk has already started to evolve. From the first episode — where he hit on every woman at the singles group — to the next, yes, he is a boor. For instance, while discussing the depressed Ralph, Kirk (who pronounces his name with a guttural "Guk") recalls a telephone call.

KIRK: I told him: You're miserable, your life stinks. What are you going to do? Kill yourself?

KATE: Then what did he say?

KIRK: I don't know, the line went dead. Hey, how is the guacamole?

But then Kirk is the only one to get Ralph a present to cheer him up.

Kirk, however, can not be expected to carry a show named after another character. John must become someone who we can like, and not simply the object of our pity. I assume we can expect the development of a relationship

between John and Kate, but as two sad characters who have had bad relationships in the past, this may lead to an unbearable situation. Who knows? I'm sure I will continue to watch the show until it runs out of steam. It'll probably make it through one year, and following prime time's third-rated program, it will almost definitely be a hit. Let's hope we can learn to like John and not just sympathize with him. But then, with the competition, ABC's "Dynasty" and CBS's "Paradise," I don't know what else I would watch... I might just end up studying Econ.

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