

# Sapphire keeps on shining with a clear blues light

By **ALLISON PIKE**  
Staff Writer

In 1987, three middle-aged women decided to leave their full-time jobs in order to pursue their first love: blues music. After playing blues part-time for four years, Sapphire embarked on its new full-time career last summer, and have been playing up and down the East Coast ever since. They'll be performing at the ArtsCenter on Feb. 8.

"Uppity Blues Women" is what the members of Sapphire, who hail from Fredericksburg, Va., have proclaimed themselves. They're proud of their womanhood, proud of their ages, proud of their musical talents, and proud of their heritages. Bassist Earlene Lewis, 43, is part Cherokee "and all Okie"; guitarist Gaye Adegbalola, 44, is a Baptist Virginian; and pianist Ann Rabson, 43, is a Jewish Ohioan.

It was Rabson who first decided to leave her job as a computer systems analyst to pursue her life-long dream of becoming a full-time musician. Adegbalola, a school teacher, and Lewis, an information analyst, both decided to take one-year leaves of absence in order to help Rabson give her dream a fair shot.

"I've taken a big chop in salary to realize a little dream of being a full-time musician," said Adegbalola. "I've been a frustrated musician since I was in high school. I figure I better go for it now before arthritis sets in."

Musically, the jazz industry has

been dominated by men who leave only the singing to women. Sapphire is unusual in that all three female members are accomplished musicians. But neither their ages nor their gender has stood in Sapphire's way. In fact, Rabson says being an all-female act has helped. "I think it's an advantage because it's unusual. But once we've gotten people's attention, we still have to prove ourselves by being good craftsmen."

"Men are great — in their place. But it's real nice working with women. At least these women. There's not a lot of competition. There's not a lot of ego problems. We're really supportive of each other, both emotionally and musically. And we're all really concerned about how the band sounds."

Songs by everyone from Cab Calloway to Little Richard to Huey Lewis comprise Sapphire's repertoire. All three group members share vocals, but each Sapphire show is highlighted by Adegbalola's soulful covers of Billie Holiday and Bessie Smith tunes.

"I was always looking to keep the blues alive," says Adegbalola. "Bessie Smith lives!"

Apart from singing, Adegbalola also writes a large portion of the band's original compositions. Her songs are both serious and light-hearted, covering topics about love — "How Can I Say I Miss You When I Can't Get You To Leave" — and her occupation — "School Teacher Blues." Adegbalola also



These "Uppity Blues Women" of Sapphire are on the road singing the blues. They perform at the ArtsCenter in Carrboro Wednesday.

writes about her age as in the song "Middle-Aged Blues Boogie" where she sings: "I'll forget about my arthritis, my backache, my lumbago. My young man makes me boogie at the horizontal disco."

As Rabson points out, the group covers the same subjects as do male songwriters. The difference is that Sapphire sings from the

viewpoint of women.

"It's nice for women in the audience if it's expressing some of their experiences. But it's nice for men, too, because it helps them understand women."

Leaving settled lives behind has its disadvantages and its risks, but Sapphire feels these risks are worth taking. Rabson says matur-

ity makes Sapphire "confident" and able to realize what the really important things in life are.

"People play this music because they love it," says Adegbalola. "It's therapy. You can get up there and bare your soul to somebody and it's like providing a catharsis for people. You aren't playing the blues for the money."



By **CATHY MCHUGH**  
Omnibus Editor

I must admit I've never seen

a groundhog and we will go to press before I'll know for sure if today is sunny. Considering it's been sunny and strangely spring-like for a while now, I guess the chances that the the groundhog will see his shadow are pretty good. And you know what that means... an end to this lovely weather we've been having.

We Americans just love all this legendary stuff and silly holidays. Groundhog Day started in 1871. I don't know why. (I have the same sickness as almost everyone else on this campus so I didn't make it to the library to look it up. If it ruins your day, let me know.) Anyway, the legend holds that if the groundhog comes out and sees his shadow he'll be frightened back

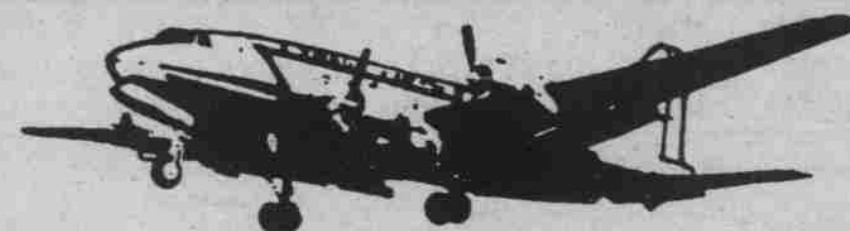
into hibernation — if the day is sunny it traditionally indicates six more weeks of winter and if the day is cloudy an early spring is expected. All of this makes a lot of sense, which is why this is a national holiday listed on every trendy calendar. I guess this means Old Man Winter will be coming back for a visit, bringing Jack Frost along for the ride. Won't that be nice?

Groundhog itself is an interesting word. In the dictionary, groundhog is cross-listed. It says, "See woodchuck." How much wood would a woodchuck chuck, if a woodchuck could chuck wood? I wonder why no one ever came up with "How much ground would a groundhog hog?"

Well, I guess that speaks for itself.

## WXYC TOP 20

- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. Gipsy Kings          | Gipsy Kings   |
| 2. Lou Reed             | New York  |
| 3. Roger Manning        | Roger Manning   |
| 4. Death of Samatha     | Where the Women Wear the Glory and the Men Wear the Pants |
| 5. Violent Femmes       | 3   |
| 6. Donnor Party         | Donnor Party  |
| 7. The Reivers          | End of the Day  |
| 8. New Order            | Technique   |
| 9. Throwing Muses       | Hunkpapa  |
| 10. Bongos Bass and Bob | Never Mind the Sex Pistols                                |
| 11. Syd Barrett         | Opel  |
| 12. Fugazi              | Fugazi  |
| 13. Woody Guthrie       | Dust Bowl Ballad  |
| 14. Replacements        | Don't Tell a Soul   |
| 15. Wonder Stuff        | The Eight Legged Groove Machine                           |
| 16. Christmas           | The Psykick Revolution                                    |
| 17. Beleza Tropical     | Brazil Classics One                                       |
| 18. Giant Sand          | The Love Songs  |
| 19. Midge Ure           | Answers to Nothing  |
| 20. The Fall            | I am Kurios Oranj   |



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