

ON STAGE

Just ask: They'll do anything you want them to



The Transactors (from top): Allison Heartinger, Peri Hope, Dan Sipp, Tim Johnston, and Greg Hone

Transactors Improv Company

Tonight, 8 p.m.
Union Cabaret

Also every Friday night at 9 p.m. at the
ArtsCenter in Carrboro until Dec. 8

Many people think it would be hard to be a stand-up comic, and it probably is. But imagine trying to be just as funny while improvising the material instead of just repeating rehearsed jokes. Such is the routine of the Transactors Improv Company.

The group formed seven years ago as a children's theater act, but they've evolved into a comedy group that fits whatever audience is present. The Transactors' material is based directly on audience participation and is done totally, as the members like to stress, "without a script."

The need for a special rapport with the audience limits the Transactors to small rooms. They usually perform in local establishments, such as Charlie Goodnights' and the Hardback Cafe, or at universities across the state. They also perform regularly at the Carrboro ArtsCenter, where the group got its start.

The group has tried bigger audiences, opening for such performers

BRYAN BURNS concert

as Dionne Warwick and Leon Redbone, and they've also had a few other unique experiences. Once they performed at a Medieval Festival where they did their usual act, but with a slight twist: All the dialogue was spoken in Olde English (with lots of Thou's, Thy's and Prithee's), and they wore full medieval costume.

The Transactors consist of Allison Heartinger, Greg Hone, Peri Hope, Tim Johnston and Dan Sipp. Although the members of the group have changed over time, this lineup has become truly dedicated; for the first time, the Transactors have become a full-time operation.

As Heartinger said, "It's not just a hobby anymore...These guys are serious about humor."

The group has various premises to enact, but the situations and specifics are based on the audience. In one sketch, the audience provides 10 emotions, such as jealousy, insane madness or lust, and a location. Two characters are placed in the location. As they begin whatever dialogue comes to them, an emotion is called out and one of the characters is struck with that feeling. (It comes out like the Warner Bros cartoon where Bugs

Bunny and Elmer Fudd change personalities depending on what hat falls upon their heads.)

There's more to improvisation than just quick thinking and good humor, however. According to Johnston, "there's a solid technique and strong rules to follow, but it's easier than working with a script." The other members agree. Having seen a group that performs part of their act improvised and part scripted, Heartinger prefers the spontaneous humor. It's understandable when improv fails, but like she says, "scripted lines should be funny; there's no excuse."

Sipp compares their preparation to basketball practice. "It's like a sports team — there are basic building blocks you use, and you have to learn these." Another big part of their rehearsals is spent talking about current happenings and building trust as they get to know each other.

But when it comes to actually performing, Heartinger says, "It's a terrifying thing to do. You have to trust the person you're with, hoping they're not going to let you down." But it's obvious that a special bond has formed quickly between the group's members. As they said, "It's a love thing."

The Transactors' unique type of comedy is something that has to be seen. No matter what type of humor the audience would like to see, they can just yell it out loud and the group will do it.

He's still alive? Oh, I get it. Camper Van Beethoven!

Camper Van Beethoven

Wednesday, Nov. 1, 10 p.m.

Cat's Cradle

Tickets \$9

The unpredictable, unprecedented Camper Van Beethoven is coming to Chapel Hill in a "bittersweet" mood. To experience their eclectic sound and own views of reality, and to get an early taste of their newly-released *Key Lime Pie*, grab nine dollars, get a ticket, and be at the Cradle.

With this tour, Camper Van Beethoven is promoting their *Key Lime Pie* creation. Through the title and the key-lime color of the album, the band continues to show the unceasing sense of humor that has made it famous. But the music underneath that humorous exterior is no joke. In the words of lead singer David Lowery, the band's newest release is "not gloomy, but moody — appreciating the richness of life, the ripening, the humor, the ironies, but also seeing the decay that goes right along with it."

However, this new direction does not signal an end to Camper Van Beethoven's early style, which pro-

MELINDA BOGARDUS concert

duced songs like "Take the Skinheads Bowling" and "Where the Hell is Bill?" Not at all. With a little help from Virgin Records, the 5-year-old band has merely achieved a better, more mature quality in its music.

This improvement is a continuation from Camper Van Beethoven's first Virgin release, the critically acclaimed *Our Beloved Revolutionary Sweetheart*. On both albums the band managed to maintain its alternative and original style without resorting to shallow modifications of earlier music.

Lowery attributes the band's improvement in sound without compromising integrity to the flexible and innovative producing of Dennis Herring. Lowery describes Herring as "real down to earth, and honest, and he has lots of good ideas. He generally comes up with stuff that's weirder than what I would come up with."

The cooperation between Virgin Records, Camper Van Beethoven and Herring has allowed the individuality and incredible wit of the band join with the rich and elaborate sound of a big label to bring Camper Van Beethoven to a new level of quality.

Not only has Camper Van



This is Camper Van Beethoven, but 'Where the Hell is Bill?'

Beethoven changed its sound, it has made a change in membership, although four of the five original members remain. The latest addition to the band is violinist Morgan Ficher, who replaced Jonathan Segel. Ficher last played in a Bay-Area band called Harm Farm, and she is now the only female and non-California native in the group.

Lowery continues to sing lead vocals and play rhythm guitar; Greg Lisher remains at lead guitar; Victor Krummenacher contributes some vocals and plays the bass and Chris Pedersen still adds vocals and drums. Together these five musicians form

quite a unique and unclassifiable band.

To remain true to such attributes, Camper Van Beethoven utilizes different themes, philosophies, stories and observations in its music. The humor that permeates these satisfies the most wit-hungry senses. Some of the new songs go further than to make you laugh; they make you wonder if you really should be laughing as they stab at some bitter truths.

Besides using many ideas and levels of humor in the lyrics, Camper Van Beethoven produces a broad spectrum of sound. The group offers many styles, including punk, country, surf, classical, mid-eastern, and

carnival. Plus, they always have a Camper Van-patented instrumental ready which will please any distinctive taste.

The band that says, "Some people say bowling alley's got big lanes," "I had a dream, I wanted to lick your knees," and "Take the skinheads bowling, take them bowling" truly understands what's going on in the world. Camper Van Beethoven can be a window to a richer, more exciting version of reality that is never more apparent than in concert. Such live interaction between the band and the audience is to David Lowery "the main act of music."