

Local artist celebrates release of first LP

John Svara

Reptiles

Tutara

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Cassette Release Party

Thursday, October 11, 9 p. m.

Union Cabaret

For more information, call 962-1449

Local talent John Svara will bring his own special brand of folk/rock to a cassette-release party for his debut LP *Reptiles* at the Union Cabaret Thursday night.

Released on the Tutara music label, the eight-song cassette features Svara as sole music writer and lyricist. John Gillespie, of Nikki meets the

CHARLES MARSHALL

Concert

Hibachi, plays bass on the album, fueling it with more feeling than ordinary folk/rock records.

Reptiles, however, can definitely be considered a folk/rock record. On first listen, it bears a striking resemblance to Tracy Chapman. Svara pipes strong, clear, soothing vocals without the rough, heavy bass sound of traditional male folk singers. But while Chapman focuses on social ills and American injustice, Svara goes back in time to the likes of Gordon Lightfoot and Jim Croce, singing about personal thoughts and experiences, more like a storybook and less like a troubled political activist.

In this apolitical approach, Svara successfully destroys Morrissey's premature notion that, "I thought that if you had an acoustic guitar that it meant that you were a protest singer."

Two songs, "Swing Tree" and "Reptile," exemplify this storybook attitude. The former utilizes a weeping bass to give it the feel of a blues ballad. The song seems to reflect the pains and thrills of growth and maturity, as Svara sings, "I grew up before my time and now I'm looking forward to return."

On "Reptile" Svara entertains the listener with a tale of his own childhood fears of snakes, iguanas and other slimy creatures, and how, even in adulthood, he is unable to shake them.

"Only Chance" enhances the bluegrass on the LP with an aggressive harmonica lead in the introduction. And while Svara's softly strummed guitar will eventually take over, this still helps save the album from folk's traditional three-chord shortcomings. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Svara doesn't just use his guitar to lay simplistic rhythms steady enough to underline outspoken vocals.

But, then, Svara doesn't use his

guitar very intensively either. Though at times he strikes up more rigorous rhythms, he doesn't venture to employ prolific string effects, like pickingsolos or striking rhythmic contrasts, that could have added another dimension to his style.

The first song on the cassette, "Low Tide," is driven by deep bass tones. This song, as well as "Until the Morning," the second-side opener, is the liveliest, using all sections of the three-piece band in strong performances. The melodies are clean and ripe, and they present attractive roadside appeal that encourages the listener to look forward to the next three songs to see what else Svara has to offer.

Unfortunately, these two songs feature the best material on the album. While some of the following songs do grab your ear, especially the aforementioned "Reptile," others, such as "Circus Tent," are more of the same type of gentle, flowing soft rock that don't offer much outside the ordinary.

This record is successful in its flex-

ibility — it's good for resting to as well as for tapping your feet and strumming along with. Svara's voice doesn't have that patented southern, homestyle twang, but it rings steady and clear, breaking out of distinctively regional categorization. Svara should be credited with making a local record that doesn't submit blandly to the styles already set by other local and regional pioneer acts. It keeps the local scene ever expanding.

Despite its highlights and shortcomings, it should be mentioned that Svara's cassette is a debut. Debut albums have a history of catching an artist in his or her truest form. They are usually more successful at claiming a musical style of their own and not at becoming the quintessential pop or rock record.

Svara has laid his claim in an unadorned, but genuinely pleasant fashion. It's definitely worth a listen, and afterward you'll want to keep your eye out for him and see what else may lie ahead.

They may be loud, so buy some new ear plugs

drivin'n'cryin'

Thursday, September 27, 10 p. m.

Cat's Cradle
tickets \$7

If you have never seen drivin'n'cryin' live (excluding their big-arena showcase with R.E.M. in the Dean Dome) then go pay seven bucks at School Kids right now for either Wednesday's or Thursday's show at the Cat's Cradle.

Next, go to Huggins Hardware and get some earplugs.

For those of you who have seen these Atlanta-based rockers before, next week's shows should be nothing less than stalwart, thorough and loud. Simply put, drivin'n'cryin' is a great live band.

Though singer/songwriter/guitarist Kevn Kinney and his two bands have frequented the Triangle area more than most out-of-state bands, each performance has had its own refreshingly impressive atmosphere.

Last fall, the Kevn Kinney Band, a.k.a. drivin'n'cryin' with Peter Buck and without distortion pedals, played

LAYTON CROFT

Concert

a warm set of bluegrass-inspired folk rock at the Cradle in support of Kinney's solo L.P., *MacDougal Blues*.

The album is a virtual scrapbook of good grinnin', porch-swing songs. Its stylistic content is a hobby-like extension of the substance that has always influenced and inspired Kinney and acted as the ultimate source of his musical expression. It's called roots.

This southern roots aspect of drivin'n'cryin' is evident throughout their five-year, three-album history. On their 1986 debut L.P., *Scarred But Smarter*, raspy, grind songs like "Saddle on the Side of the Road" and "Bring Home the Bacon" suggest direct influences from the likes of Hank Williams Jr. and Lynyrd Skynyrd.

But one of drivin'n'cryin's greatest assets is their conviction in their own music. In other words, they may have "musical influences," but they make purely original, beat-of-their-own-drum music. Furthermore,

drivin'n'cryin' are masters at creating albums that cross more musical boundaries than even a K-TEL record.

Drivin'n'cryin's best album to date, 1988's *Whisper Tames the Lion*, is a plethora of different styles of southern rock. Put the AC/DC tinged "Powerhouse" next to the John Denveresque "Blue Ridge Way" on a mix tape and your friends may shout, "Wow, what a wild mix! These songs cross more musical boundaries than a K-TEL record!"

Kinney has been criticized in the past as a naive lyricist: one who bites off more than he can chew in terms of lyrical substance and poetry. In 1989,

Mystery Road made strides in Kinney's lyrical poignancy and cohesive direction, if not in exploring new musical frontiers, most of which the band had already toyed with.

On this album, Kinney sings about real people in real context. I know that sounds like generic all-American praise, but each song has an extraordinarily personal feel, with most songs telling stories that seem to have been penned from personal experience and enhanced by rich acoustic overtones.

Kinney never strays off the path into the tempting realm of extended metaphors and pop-singer profundity.

He does not preach — he tells.

Tunes like "Ain't It Strange," "With the People" and "House For Sale" are fine examples of this down-to-earth, easy-to-read, storytelling songwriting style that complements the band's southern grind sound.

So regardless of how drivin'n'cryin' approaches next week's shows, three things are certain:

1. No one will be let down by the band's performance.
2. For the virgin listener, Kevn Kinney's voice will remain as distinct in your head as the film *Wild at Heart*.
3. The band will indeed have their Marshall amps turned up to "eleven".

First Law of Thermodynamics:

The energy of the universe is constant. Energy can be transformed, but it can neither be created nor destroyed.

OMNIBUS.
Mysteries of the Universe Explained.

A Literary Event!

Jill McCorkle

will read from her latest novel,

FERRIS BEACH

on Tuesday, October 16th
at 3:00 p.m.



at the
Bull's Head Bookshop
UNC Student Stores
962-5060

