

TIME TO GIVE CHAPEL HILL A CHANCE

BY JOHN MCLEOD
STAFF WRITER

After three U.S. tours, a number of 7 inch releases and a full length CD release, the members of Hellbender have decided to give their home town of Chapel Hill a chance.

"We hadn't really played here with any kind of seriousness until recently," said Wells Tower, guitar player for the trio.

After four years of playing for small crowds across the country, sometimes too small to be called a crowd, the members of Hellbender are ready for a more appreciative local following.

"People are starting to like us in Chapel Hill and it's nice," said Al Burian, bass player and singer.

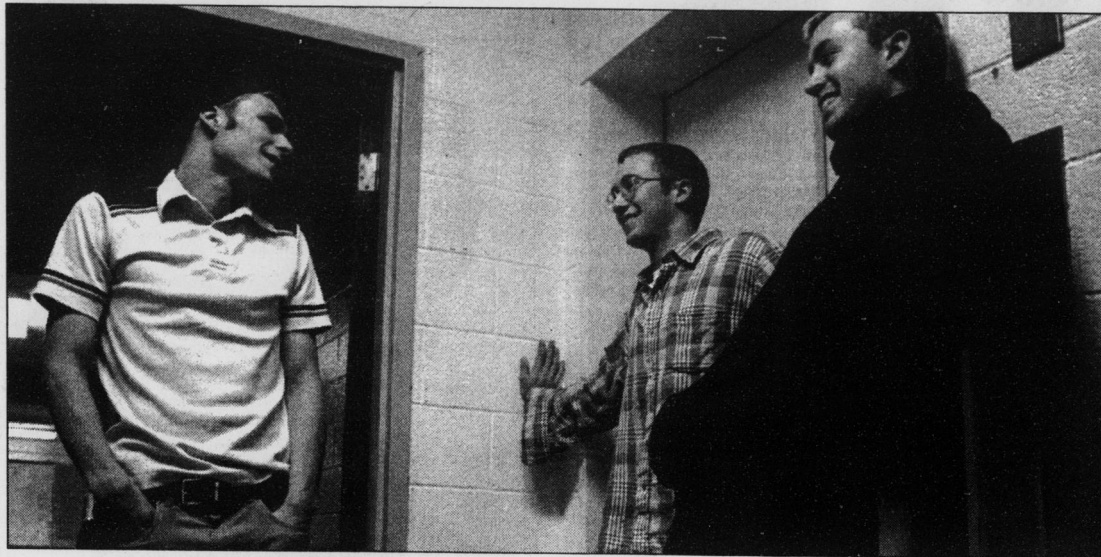
The band recently played a number of local shows surprising those who had never heard of them with their tight delivery of punk rock.

But acceptance in Chapel Hill has not come easily for the band, according to Burian. He said their punk style has caused some people to think they are some type of "hard-ass" band on a mission.

"I think it is funny to be conceived of as some kind of hard-ass," said Burian. "In context, I completely think I am not, but I am kind of a big mouth. In punk rock circles we aren't extreme at all, but here everyone says, 'Wow, you explain all your songs and were talking all this shit!' We are going to play in New York this weekend and will be considered the wimpiest, crappiest Green Day imitators with nothing to say. I guess it's all just context."

Part of the reason Hellbender is so obscure in these parts is that the three members of the band—Burian, Tower and drummer Harrison Haynes—all went separate ways for college. Instead of playing in Chapel Hill during their summers together, they opted to tour across the country and record 7 inches whenever they could.

"Basically, we started by recording some songs and putting out a 7 inch," said Burian.



Despite national tours and a loyal following, Chapel Hill's Hellbender aren't well known at home.

"Then we went to college for a year and that summer we did a short tour. It went really good, well it didn't, but we thought it did."

"The stories we had to tell people when we got back were enough to compensate for how bad it was," said Haynes.

The band tours more than the average local band. Burian said he thought it was important to play every chance possible—something that is hard to do locally without wearing out your welcome.

"Despite what we were saying about how it sucks to play for just three people," Burian said of a particularly humbling show in South Dakota, "another thing I have learned is that you should play any chance, anywhere you can."

"Playing for three people in South Dakota is

Local Band Profile

Last Release:

Hellbender full-length CD (Bohemoth)

Next Show:

no local shows in the near future.

better than just sitting on your ass in South Dakota," Haynes said.

The band's latest effort was a two-month tour and saw the release of a full length CD. The band also recorded four songs with Caleb Southern in December that will be released on a compilation and on a 7 inch sometime soon.

Burian said he felt that the way the band deals with issues in their lyrics goes against a general attitude of sarcasm among many younger people.

"It's weird now as far as the indie-rock scene is concerned, or really just about anyone over 16, anything that is sincerely political is viewed as being kind of nerdy," Burian said.

"They think it is alright to be political if you are

being a smart-ass about it, but sincerity is not okay," Tower said. "It's interesting to look at our lyrics because they have gone from the macro to the micro, politically. They used to be sort of, broad indictments of the housing industry or something, whereas now they are more about hanging out and thinking about stuff. I don't know, it seems a little bit more honest to do it that way; to bring them down to a more personal level rather than trying to have some big, aloof doctrine."

For now, the band has to split up again until Haynes and Tower finish school. They plan to play a lot in Chapel Hill and the surrounding area this summer while making two-week tours up and down the coast.

"In a way it's weird to play where you are from because it's like playing for your family, but just extended family," said Burian. "But it's really comfortable and nice, it's something we have never really experienced."

King Brooks Continues 'Hits' Reign

It takes most artists several years and many releases before they have enough good songs to produce a greatest hits album. But when you are the reigning "king of country," you get to work on a shorter time table. It was just six years ago that Garth Brooks' first, self-titled release hit the market. He caught the attention of country music fans everywhere with that album's first single "If Tomorrow Never Comes." The song hit number one back in 1989, but then that's no real surprise. Every single Garth Brooks has ever released has gone on to become a top ten smash.



Garth Brooks
The Hits
(Liberty)
A+

Brooks' popularity exploded in 1990, with the release of *No Fences*. No Fences included "Friends in Low Places," which Brooks describes as "probably the biggest song I'll ever do." He's probably right. In a career that has covered the pensive ("Unanswered Prayers") the raucous ("Ain't Goin' Down") the controversial ("The Thunder Rolls") and the honky tonk—"Friends in Low Places" was the song that really put Brooks on the map.

Now four years and three albums later, Brooks has included "Friends in Low Places" and three other hits from *No Fences* on his *The Hits* CD. Brooks has taken several interesting turns with *The Hits*. First, there is the price. In a day when a CD can command upward of \$18, Brooks has dictated a lower price for this CD. It can be picked up in the \$12-\$13 range in most stores.

Secondly, the CD is being offered in limited number for only a limited time. A smart move on Brooks' part for two reasons. It creates a greater demand for the product, and it will not cut into his already staggering album sales. Included with *The Hits* is a Garth Brooks "Zoom CD," which includes 30 second clips from all of Brooks

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Pipe Downs Fitz of Depression With Snotty Liberti

Have TV commercials ruined your attention span for good? Do you refuse to eat anything that can't be microwaved in less than a minute? Do you take five-minute breaks between articles in USA Today to let the headache subside? Then, friend, put down that Phish album before you hurt yourself. What you need is speedy punk rock to match the pace of your fast-forward life. Local miscreants Pipe and Olympia, Wash.'s Fitz of Depression give you just what the doctor ordered with their brand new albums, both of which clock in at under 30 minutes and collectively offer you 25 songs of wild-eyed abandon, the vast majority of which slam-bang to a halt just before the two-minute mark.

RICHARD ALLEN

Pipe
Six Days Till Bellus (Jesus Christ)
B+

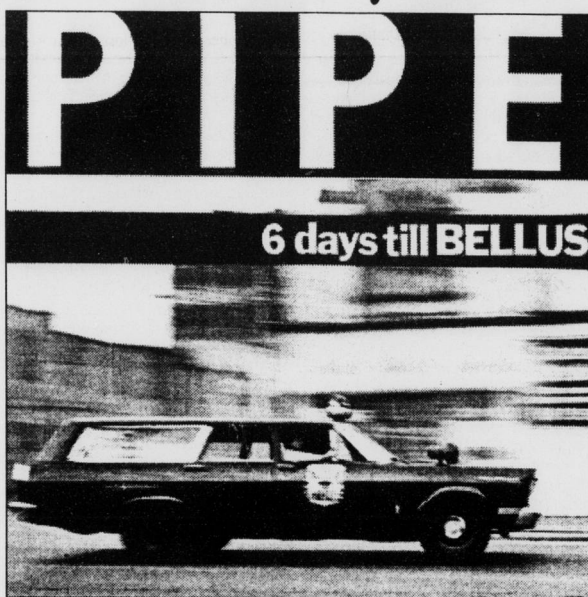
Fitz of Depression
Let's Give it a Twist (K Records)
B

Pipe is by far the catchier of the two, mostly due to singer Ron Liberti's astoundingly snotty voice—Billie Joe, King Ad Rock, and other such pretenders should kneel at his feet. As for the lyrical content, song titles like "Bowling for Fuckers" and "Breakfast in Veronica" are fairly indicative of the topics Liberti addresses—at least I assume so, because it ain't exactly easy to understand him sometimes. The other three guys keep the music tight and to the point—I don't think there's a guitar solo anywhere on this record, just spastic power chording over hopped-up beats. And once you tire of pogoing to this record in your crummy little South Campus dorm room, go see them live—as much for the beer can air war that inevitably ensues as for anything else.

Fitz of Depression have been around for five years, but this is their first album, which isn't surprising once you give it a listen—when your 15-song live set lasts half an hour, putting out a full album must seem a daunting task indeed in this age of 60-minute CDs. The Fitz apparently just threw up their hands in despair and gave us what they had, which turns out to be 12 songs in 24 minutes. More so than Pipe, their music lends itself to direct comparisons with older bands like the Ramones and the Misfits (Ramones fans might mistake one or two of these for Ramones covers). Unfortunately, FOD's vocals lack the character of Pipe's and tend to be pushed back in the mix. That notwithstanding, the energy keeps things on track and moving along nicely.

"So if these 'punk' bands is so good," you say, "What's with the above-average-but-not-outstanding marks you give 'em?"

Well, both of these discs are great for quick energy, kind of like a Dr. Pepper Big Gulp or one of those Power Bars you buy at convenience stores that bear more than a passing resemblance to dehydrated calf tongues. Unfortunately, when you're dealing with a bare-bones musical style like old-school punk rock, the songs have to grab your attention quick or else everything just blurs together and you find yourself examining your fingernails instead of eyeing the stereo. Both of these discs have the grabbers (with Pipe leading in that department), but they've also got a fair amount of tunes that get lost in the



Pipe (above) and Fitz of Depression (right) prove that Chapel Hill and Olympia, Wash., have more in common than just good "pop" music.



stew. At least that's how it seems to a regular guy like me, not a video-game-addled hophead like you who'll probably find

this stuff symphonic. Get it now, and see if you don't toss that expensive Ritalin prescription right out the window and shimmy yourself into the floor.

DISCOGRAPHY

Pipe

- "Submariner" split single with Small (Matt Label)
- "Astray" b/w "Warsaw" 7-inch (Merge)
- Ball Peen CD EP (Sonic Bublegram)
- "Human Gutterball" b/w "Figure 8" 7-inch (Merge)
- "You're Soaking In It" b/w "Trouble" 7-inch (Amish)
- Six Days Till Bellus LP (Jesus Christ)

Fitz of Depression

- "Pissbutt" b/w "Red Shoes" 7-inch (Blatant)
- Self-titled 10-inch EP (Meat)
- Let's Give It A Twist LP (K)

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1. Dama & D'Gary
The Long Way Home (Shanachie)
guitar magic from Madagascar
2. Paris
Guerilla Funk (Priority)
hardcore rap with a point
3. Various Artists
Stolen Moments: Red, Hot & Cool (Red Hot)
b-boys team up with jazz greats
4. Pipe
Six Days Till Bellus (Jesus Christ)
Chapel Hill action rock
5. Dr. Isaiah Ross
Call The Doctor (Testament)
one-man blues band
6. Spatula
Even The Thorny Acacias (Jesus Christ)
driving music from the masters of song construction
7. Diggable Planets
Blowout Comb (Pendulum)
hip hop from a mixed bag of influences
8. Zen Frisbee
I'm Mad As Faust (Flavor Contra)
mid-eastern guitar wizardry...from Chapel Hill
9. Davka
Davka (Interworld)
traditional jewish music fused with the world
10. Cardinal
Cardinal (Fly Daddy)
early 70s-style wimp pop

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