

Archers of Loaf Busy Recording New Album, Releasing Old Favorites

BY WENDY MITCHELL
SENIOR WRITER

Browsing through the used bins at Schoolkids a few weeks ago, I stumbled across the Archers of Loaf's monumental first album, *Icky Mettle*. My first thought: Is any hunger so great that such a disc should be sold? My second thought: maybe I should buy it, because mine is a bit worn. Slightly obsessive, but we're talking about the Archers of Loaf: four fairly average Chapel Hillians who have been making very un-average music for four years.

Though they've become indie darlings nationwide, I still like to believe there's some part of Chapel Hill in those frenzied, twisted guitars and angry groans. Not redneck kitsch like Southern Culture on the Skids, but another kind of southern influence comes across in those punk jabs and pop hooks: a recklessness inspired by sitting in a kitchen on a sweltering 90-plus degree day growing impatient as flies buzz and the screen door slams.

But sit down for this one — Chapel Hill's arguably greatest export might not be calling Chapel Hill home for long. From a payphone somewhere in Seattle during a break from recording, bassist Matt Gentling hinted that relocation was a possibility, although — of course — nothing was definite.

Gentling, albeit hesitant to leave his "really cool place in Carboro" would like to get back to mountainous Asheville. He said vocalist/guitarist Eric Bachmann may move to Seattle, Ann Arbor, Mich., or Washington, D.C., when his girlfriend

graduates from medical school soon. Gentling said he thought relocation and/or separation wouldn't be a problem in the Archers' future. "I don't think it would have that much of an effect since we're touring so much. The only thing it would effect is us coming together to write songs and that sort of thing," he said. "I don't think it will be a big deal."

As we await consequences and their third full-length (due out in September), there's a new treat to hold us over: the recently-released rarities collection, *The Speed of Cattle*. Included in the 18 tracks are the Archers' session with BBC DJ John Peel, two Treetop covers, a home recording of "Web in Front." While all such albums are problematic — combining the stuff great enough to be singles ("Wrong" and "South Carolina") with the stuff that easily slipped through the cracks ("Powerwalker") — *Cattle* is a must for anyone who missed the early singles. Or anyone who was poor enough to sell them.

Gentling and I chatted about *The Speed of Cattle*, their new album, and why he's clowning around less on stage:

DTH: How did the singles compilation get started? Why did you decide to put that out?

Matt Gentling: Well, unlike a lot of the other stuff we've put out, it was something that was in our contract. And it was also that we had a lot of stuff floating around that was either hard to get a hold of or was never released on anything. We just wanted to release those things because we liked them and we thought it would be fun to put them out. It's sort of half way between that and the fact that it was in our contract.

You guys are concentrating on your new stuff — is it weird having people paying attention to your really old stuff?

Yeah, it is weird. I haven't really seen much of it. We haven't talked to many people who have *The Speed of Cattle*. A couple of times we've run into people who have just heard our really old stuff for the first time. And that's pretty wild, hearing them react to that, when we're working hard on our new stuff.

Is there anything on there that makes you cringe now?

A couple of things. Most of it we really wanted to release. But there are a couple of things that make us feel really silly.

Like what?

Parts that we've played. I know Eric doesn't like some lyrics from the old songs. It's just little things here and there. Nothing real specific or real terrible, luckily.

And how's the new recording going?

It's going really well, actually. It's sounding better than anything we've done so far. I hope I haven't jinxed us by saying that. It's just a matter of all the other stuff we did, it was limited time-wise and by the facility — we didn't have a really big room, which we'd always wanted to work in. We've always done stuff with people we thought were really good at what they did — Bob (Weston, *Vee Vee*) and Caleb (Southern, *Icky Mettle*). And Brian (Paulson) is no different — he's incredible. What really makes a difference is the time and the facilities as well as somebody who knows what to do with them. *Vee Vee* was kind of hurried, we didn't have all the songs completely written by the time we went in



Archers of Loaf is recording its third full-length album in Seattle with producer Brian Paulson.

there, and so we were still doing a little bit of finishing up when we were in there ... so that could be a little hectic. We did a little bit of that this time, but it was voluntary.

How did you guys decide to go with him? We'd always liked stuff that he had done. Some Uncle Tupelo stuff, Son Volt, Wilco, Superchunk. And as a band, one of

our favorite albums in the universe is *Spiderland* (the pre-eminent work by Slint). See ARCHERS, Page 7

Fleming & John Reminiscent of Divinyls

It may sound like I'm going for nothing more than the cheap critical blurb, but I swear that at times Fleming & John sound like a hybrid between a rock-inclined Enya and some wacky operatic cocktail funk. I understand your confusion. But that's the beauty of *Delusions of Grandeur*, the new major label release from vocalist Fleming McWilliams and musical handyman John Mark Painter. (Quick trivia quiz: Are they married? Answer: Yes.) It's an album with 100 different faces. If *Grandeur* was the video game "Contra," and F&J's music were a gun, we'd be talking scattershot. Some of their tracks may typify the "lite" rock trend so many blues-inspired bands seem to call upon these days, but Fleming & John aren't

afraid to bring the harder rock on tracks like "Letters In My Head" and "I'm Not Afraid."

Some of their songs recall the Divinyls. And some the Indigo Girls. And the list could go on and on. It's actually not too surprising, since Painter played guitar, trumpet and accordion on the Indigo Girls' *Swamp Ophelia*. Their rock roots and influences are further evidenced by the fact that Ben Folds shows up to play drums on several of the tracks. His characterization of the duo? "Fleming & John," Folds is quoted as saying in the album's press material, "are the Carpenters of the '90s, with Led Zeppelins rhythm section." Good call.

"I'm Not Afraid," the album's first single, slips from a wistful groove piece to borderline venom rock with surprising ease. With catchy hooks and lyrics like, "I'm afraid of growing old/I'm afraid of staying young and running out of fun," F&J display a maturity that makes you ask, "Did

these two spend eight years paying their dues and playing assorted gigs and clubs?" Then it turns out that they did just that and everything makes a little more sense.

"Love Songs" is the rarest of ballads. Not only does it have genuinely reflective lyrics, but also a strong musical backbone. The flighty "Rain All Day" opens with a siren-like wail and moves through a nice melancholy arrangement. McWilliams has a great voice, stronger than Sheryl Crow and as distinctive and recognizable as Alanis Morissette. And — more impressively — she knows how to use it, varying her pitch, volume and inflection in a manner that fits comfortably within the beats and rhythms of the songs. If there was a cute summary paragraph for this review, it might offer some sort of strange statement like: Fleming & John are a revamped Roxette for the '90s, a thinking man's pop where unthreatening guitar meets pleasant arrangements and distinctive vocals.

BRENT SIMON

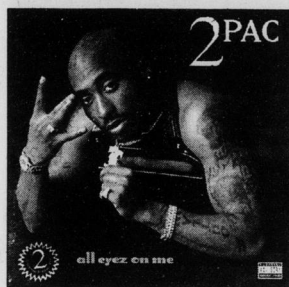
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'All Eyez' Fall on 2Pac After New CD Release

The first time you saw Tupac, he was laid back in Digital Underground's "Same Song" video, bald and surrounded by women in a pseudo-African, Big Daddy Kane-esque, remind you of Huey Newton-in-the-wicker-chair scene. He was 1989's Black Caesar. You didn't know if he was hard or soft, but you knew his shit was tight. Delivering potent lyrics with rapid rhymes, his flow delicately danced on the subtle line between being too fast and too relaxed — a line few mc's had the skills to walk.

Four albums, five bullets, 11 months of jail and one nappy-ass high-top fade later, Tupac hasn't changed too much. Tupac is still a magnificent, walking oxymoron, and his new album, *All Eyez On Me*, reflects this. On two CD's and 27 songs he'll both impress and repulse you in the same breath of a lyric. He struts with a rebellious intensity reminiscent of his performance in "Juice" on songs like "Hearts of Men," where he raps "I can be a villain if you let me/A Mothaphukka if you do upset me/Tell the cops to come and get me." Then he can get mushy and sentimental, like he's trying to rap to Janet Jackson, as he does on "Life Goes On": "But now that you're gone/I'm in a zone/Thinkin', I don't want to die alone/And all I got left is sinkin' memories."

In "All About U," the chauvinist Tupac croons with the same mindset that got a certain UNC fraternity into trouble last fall. He raps, "I see you starin' like you



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want it/Well baby if you got a better thought, let the liquor help you get up on it." "How Do You Want It" embodies Tupac's contradictions. Featuring KC and JoJo from Jodeci, the song's provocative title and sultry sound foreshadow a sexy type of temptation. Tupac begins, "Love the way you aggravate your hips and push your ass out/Catch you at the club, Oh shit, you've got me feenin'/Body talking shit to me but I can't comprehend the meanin'."

But then, somewhere in the middle, Tupac crosses a great frontier with one stride. Between the words "Alaze" and "Delores Tucker," he goes from talking about hoochies to rambling on about political issues. Jumping so quickly from one subject to the next would make one think Delores Tucker is some around-the-way-girl he knows who resembles the rap regulator of the same name. Then he wittily remarks, "Delores Tucker, you's a motherphukka/ Instead of tryin to help a nigga, you destroy brother/ Worse than the others...They want to censor me, they'd

rather see me in a cell/ Livin' in hell" — insightful political commentary, but in the wrong place. The album's diversity becomes its only potential setback — he addresses enough topics for several albums.

2Pac's return-to-the-West Coast verses fit perfectly between Richie Rich's thick Oakland playa style and E-40's 150 mph lyrics in "Ain't Hard 2 Find." On "Got My Mind Made Up," Redman's flows kick like Bruce Lee ridin' a Fuji, and Method Man's chorus ("I got my mind made up/ C'mon, get into it/ Let it ride/ Tonight's the night") compliments Tupac's lyrics. He raps, "My lyrics motivate the planet/ It's similar to Rhythm Nation but thugged out/ Forgive me Janet."

Tupac and Dr. Dre in particular fit together well on the hit single "California Love." Frequent backup from other Death Row "imates" Snoop Doggy Dogg, Nate Dogg, Daz and Kurupt will convince you that Tupac belongs in the Death Row family. Tupac discusses how marginalized he and Snoop are as black men in "Amerikaz Most Wanted," his life after court cases in "Life Goes On," open relationships in "Run Tha Streetz" and heaven in "Heaven ain't Hard 2 Find."

He has all the prerequisites for being the label's first adopted son — 2Pac's high-powered lyrics are matched in controversy only by his flamboyant and contradictory lifestyle, never mind his pending court cases.

At least eight of the tracks on *All Eyez On Me* will get you moving; even my father recommends the album. He likes "Got My Mind Made Up," "Heartz of Men," "California Love," "What's Ya Phone #," and "Check Out Time."

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