



Thursday, September 20, 2001 ■ Page 5

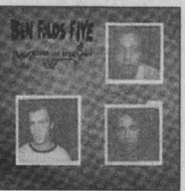
'Male, Middle Class and White'

Bits o' Ben: Selected Works



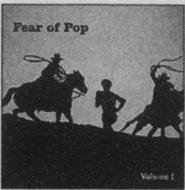
Ben Folds Five - 1995
★★★★★

Folds' debut with his Five (they were actually a trio) is his most youthful and energetic work and establishes the group's fundaments: piano, bass and drums - no guitars allowed. What it lacks in orchestration it makes up for in attitude.



Whatever and Ever Amen - 1997
★★★★★

The album that made the group a household name is Folds' best overall record. Irreverent takes on contemporary relationships made Folds Generation X's darling. And "Angry Dwarf" and "Song for the Dumped" solidified Folds' penchant for, using curse words like a fine spice.



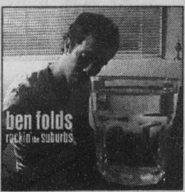
Fear of Pop, Vol. 1 - 1998
★★★★★

Largely spoken word pieces over avant-garde beats and synthesizers, it's Folds' most noncommercial album. At best, it makes for great Muzak for the techno-lite set, but Folds' collaboration with a hammy William Shatner in, "In Love" is almost worth the price alone.



The Unauthorized Biography of Reinhold Messner - 1999
★★★★★

Folds experiments with the Ben Folds Five sound, to various degrees of success, by adding dramatic, symphonic flourishes and '70s Bacharach-style band numbers. Adding to the sound was a good idea, but not if the hooks are sacrificed. Not a bad album, just not a satisfying one.



Rockin' the Suburbs - 2001
★★★★★

The return of Ben Folds, piano-pop songsmith extraordinaire. He's truly solo here - he plays every instrument on the album. Now a few guitars and keyboards turn up, and the songs are generally slower than before. The title track (and current single) is radio-tailored rock, poking fun at today's rap-rock bands. "Not the Same," "Losing Lisa" and "Gone" rank among Folds' very best songs.

By Brian Millikin

By SARAH KUCHARSKI
Assistant Arts & Entertainment Editor

Ben Folds fans, rejoice and hold onto your hats. Six years after bursting on to the music scene with the melancholy ballad "Brick," Ben Folds is back in the rotation with a new album, new band and new hit, "Rockin' The Suburbs."

The first recording since the breakup of Ben Folds Five, *Rockin' The Suburbs* was released Sept. 11 to an eagerly waiting audience. Folds said that like earlier works, the album does not follow any clear evolutionary pattern. It simply mirrors the personality of its creator.

"I think every one of the albums I've made has been a good reflection of where I am at the moment," he said in a recent interview with *The Daily Tar Heel*.

Now after almost a decade of musical and personal changes, a solo Folds is in the midst of a month-and-a-half-long promotional tour. On Sept. 7 and 8 he returned to Cat's Cradle, where he played his first gigs, to kick it off.

Having nurtured his talents in the womb of Chapel Hill, thus being born unto the ranks of "Late Show" performers, Folds is the quintessential homegrown boy who made it big. Born in Winston-Salem, Folds began studying music at an early age. After only two years of formal piano lessons, he went on to study music in school, including percussion and orchestra, but focused mostly on improving his keyboard and composition skills.

Folds moved to Chapel Hill and formed the trio known as Ben Folds Five in the mid-1990s. Hailed as a departure from typically cluttered, trite rock, the trio developed a loyal local following. Two years after their self-titled debut album, Ben Folds Five signed on to Epic/550 Records and released *Whatever and Ever Amen* with the single "Brick."

A song about a teenage couple who chose to have an abortion, "Brick" garnered much media attention and speculation as to whether the song was a glimpse into Folds' autobiographical history.

"Almost everything I've ever written was (autobiographical) to some extent," Folds said.

And "Brick" was no exception. Speaking of his girlfriend at the time, Folds said, "I was 16 years old and we were in high school and we made the decision to have an abortion."

Hence, the song was a result of Folds' desire to dedicate a song to that girlfriend, memorialize the event and cope with his own emotions.

See BEN FOLDS, Page 7



DTH/ARIEL SHUMAKER

Ripping into "Rockin' the Suburbs" at his Sept. 7 show at Cat's Cradle, Ben Folds came back to the Cradle to launch his tour in support of the singer-songwriter-pianist's new album of the same name. A former Chapel Hill resident, Folds is one of the town's musician who made good.

Folds Returns Home, Opens Tour With 2-Day Show

On the first of two shows, the wry lyricist showcased his new band mates during a brief but high-energy set.

By BRIAN MILLIKIN
Staff Writer

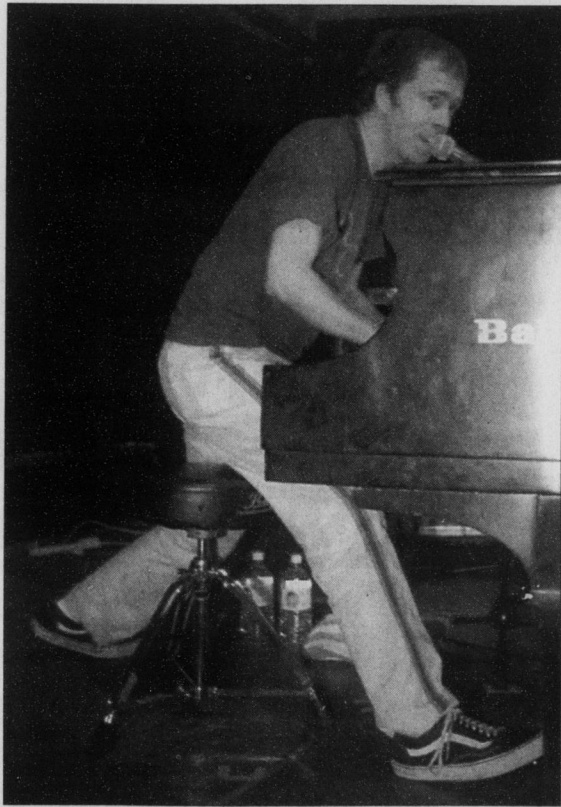
A sold-out crowd filtered into Cat's Cradle. Some wore Ben Folds Five T-shirts, others clutched posters. All have the same question in their heads: Will it be our Ben who makes his solo debut tonight? Has his music changed? Has he grown up?

A baby grand piano was pulled into the center of the stage, putting most doubts to bed. When Folds entered, he walked quickly across the stage, flashed the crowd the "love you" sign and said simply, "Thank you."

He went straight to the piano keys and launched into "Not the Same," an emotive, up-tempo ballad from his new album. He sang with his crystalline, plaintive voice and pounded at the piano keys adeptly. The crowd roars: their Ben is back.

Folds and his new band - a drummer, a bassist, and a guitarist/keyboardist - swept through three more new songs before pausing. The verdict was that Folds hadn't changed all that much: the songs were upbeat and funny, stories about a goofy couple and troubled people, all with great melodies. The biggest change was the addition of a guitar into the mix - a Ben Folds Five no-no.

As if acknowledging the audience's possible apprehension toward the new



DTH/ARIEL SHUMAKER

Despite rumors of heading the "guitar rock" route, Folds and his trademark Baldwin piano were the central focus during his sets.

musicians, Folds frequently turned the spotlight to his band. On several occasions he'd step back from his piano and nod along to his new guitarist's solos. Even the bass player and the

drummer were given energetic fills to sink their teeth into. It all felt very new, but very familiar.

See CONCERT, Page 7

Folds Tones Down Usual Stage Antics To Focus on New Material at Show

By JASON ARTHURS
Staff Writer

"It's good to be back at here in Chapel Hill," "Man it's been too long since I've been back here," and "There's no place like Cat's Cradle" - all things Ben Folds did not say at Saturday night's concert that marked part two of Folds' anticipated return from down under.

But the crowd - made up mostly of polo-shirt-and-tube-top-wearing UNC grads (after having had to sit through the karaoke torture of opening act Citizen "I can't give my album away" Cope) - weren't the most welcoming crowd, either.

No doubt those fans expecting a Ben Folds Five show got exactly one third of what they were hoping for. Fans excited about the new Folds material were treated to an energetic performance of pop gems whose main departure from Folds' old material is the addition of an electric guitar to the mix.

Folds decided not to dip too far into his bag of stage antics - smashing his piano stool on the keyboard and singing heavy metal songs on top of his baby grand - instead opting to let his new music speak for itself.

"Everybody knows it sucks to grow up/everybody knows it's weird to be back here," he sang, clearly conveying his awkwardness.

While many of the faster songs he played with his new band merely invoked longing for the good old days of Ben Folds Five, the new slower ballads that focused on Folds' patented harmo-

ny-driven melodies charmed the crowd with ease.

It was the rest of Folds' band - for the most part look-and-sound-alikes of his former bandmates - that never quite caught on with me.

Folds didn't even seem very comfortable with the new crew at first, but as the show went on the jet-lagged Folds started enjoying himself more.

As the show came to a conclusion, I was curious as to whether Folds would indulge the crowd's requests for classics or try to protect the sanctity of his old band and refuse.

He came back onto stage for an encore, only now he was bandless.

Without an introduction, he sang "I feel like a quote out of context," sending the crowd into a frenzy. In addition to "Best Imitation of Myself," Folds honored a request for "The Last Polka" and even sang the song's drum solo. The guilt of the pleasure I got from this encore was offset by the fact that Folds hadn't enlisted his new bands' help on these hits.

But he wasn't done yet. The band came up and played two more classics with him. But as soon as Folds stroked his hand across the back wiring of his piano for the opening notes of the spine-tingling "Smoke," I temporarily forgot Ben was sans Five. To make sure the crowd left happy, Folds closed with "Song For the Dumped."

Yes, Ben, it's weird to have you back here. But in a good way.

And luckily for Saturday night's crowd, you do, in fact, do a great imitation of yourself.

The Arts & Entertainment Editor can be reached at artsdesk@unc.edu.