

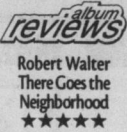
Walter Dazzles With Blend of Funk-Based Blues

By GRAHAM PARKER
Staff Writer

Funk is not dead, nor does it sleep. And if the forces of funk were ever to rise up against today's pop powerhouses, pianist/composer Robert Walter would lead them.

The San Diego native has branched off from his band, 20th Congress, to record his latest album, *There Goes the Neighborhood*. Recording the whole album in a two-day jam session surrounded by some of today's finest funk, blues and jazz artists, Walter has merged three old schools of thought into a sound that's impossible to describe as anything but amazing.

Think of it as Shaft does New Orleans. Blending three styles of music into one seamless groove might seem tricky, but Walter and his musicians step smoothly over genre lines with their funk key-



Robert Walter
There Goes the Neighborhood
★★★★★

boards, jazz piano and bluesy bass licks. His music refuses to be pinned down and pigeonholed as any particular style.

Oftentimes a song will start out as pure funk, only to shift into jazz with the insertion of an improv piano lick, courtesy of Walter's fast hands and excellent composing skills.

And some of the tracks are so different from each other that one wonders if one is still listening to the same group.

The first half of the CD is straight out of the '70s. The title track features smooth funk keyboards and guitar playing counterpoint to improv saxophone, with solid bass and drum work filling in the background.

Walter slows things down for the last half, dropping the album's initially funky feel and displaying his blues and jazz roots for songs like "Swap Meet."

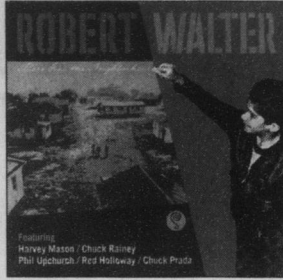
The bluesy songs come across as smoother than the preceding funk, and their simplicity contrasts beautifully with the first tracks' elaborate grooves.

Each guest gets his chance with the melody in songs like "Bakery Blues," as the high-speed organ intro gives way to Walter's steady, old-school blues piano and an awesome bass solo courtesy of Chuck Rainey.

It's a rare album indeed that showcases each performer in this manner, and luckily there isn't a bad musician in the whole bunch.

Powerful saxophone and keyboard work appear in nearly every track. Ordinarily, this kind of repetition would get old fast but not with performers of this caliber.

Sax player Red Holloway stands out from the rest. Each of his solos is unique,



Featuring: Heavy Mazon / Chuck Rainey / Phil Upchurch / Red Holloway / Chuck Pratt

from the intricate improv of "My Babe" to the smooth feel of "2% Body Fat."

The album closes with "Luck," a slow and introspective piece featuring easy sax licks and simple piano solos that wouldn't sound out of place backing up a gospel choir.

The idea of a funk musician playing spirituals seems pretty far-fetched, and therein lies Walter's genius. Not only is he a piano and synthesizer master, he also can compose a piece of music that cannot be defined as any style but his own.

And Walter is easily one of the best jazz pianists of his generation, swapping his synthesizer for electric organ and piano in the middle of a song. His varied delivery and undeniable skill make every bit of keyboard work different and entertaining.

Talented and creative, he could become funk's new standard bearer. With the recent resurgence of funk in the music world, it's good to see the old genre get a new treatment, especially in the hands of someone as capable as Robert Walter.

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

Hip Hoppers Ignite Cradle With DJ Skills, Recklessness

By TRAFTON DREW
Staff Writer

It's not often a good hip-hop act comes to the area (Ja Rule does not count).

Monday's show at Cat's Cradle offered three: the Arsonists, DJ Swamp and Swollen Members, yet the Cradle was less than half full.

Oddly enough, although all the artists had unique stage presence, they shared one common, bizarre characteristic—a fixation with hard rock.

Swollen Members rocked the show to a start with an angry set complete with much more headbanging than head nodding.

DJ Swamp scratched and sampled everything from Nirvana to Muddy Waters and was aptly described by the emcee of the evening as "the Gene Simmons of DJ-ing" after periodically blowing fire and igniting everything from his fingers to his turntables. What the Arsonists lacked in pyrotechnics, they made up for in energy, and the show ended with a full-scale mosh pit.

The maddening thing about these antics was that each failed to ignite the crowd. The Arsonists finally won over the crowd with better known joints like "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?" and "Language Arts," but for the majority of the show, the performers looked lost on the stage as they vainly attempted to get the crowd to jump or at least raise their hands. It follows the Chapel Hill audi-

ence tradition—"if they just stand there, that means they like you."

Each group reacted differently to the general malaise of the crowd. Swollen Members became progressively more hostile and out of control. It all culminated in Madchild falling onto his DJ's turntables, which forced the group to start over their best song, "Lady Venom."

Swamp stunned the crowd into silence punctuated by "oohs" and "ahhs" with his turntable skills. Unfortunately, he followed up the turntable intro with several tracks off his new album where he raps. Though DJ Swamp is undoubtedly one of the world's most talented DJs, he is no rapper. There was a collective sigh of relief every time he put down the mic.

The Arsonists have been around in one form of another since 1993, and their experience showed throughout the show as they slowly won over the crowd with their infectiously goofy stage presence.

Whether they were doing a Run DMC impression complete with choreographed dance numbers or hyping the crowd up by actually performing from within the crowd, everything Q-Unique, Jise and Swel 79 did drew the crowd closer.

At the moment, few underground hip hoppers would consider going out of their way to come to the Triangle, but if someone had stumbled into the Cradle during the last 20 minutes of Monday's show, they would think that time might not be far off.

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O'Connell Plays Well With Others; Deep Dish Spins Hot Set

Maura O'Connell
Walls and Windows
★★★★★

Irish songstress Maura O'Connell has made a career of recording the material of other songwriters.

A former vocalist for Celtic group De Danaan, O'Connell embarked on a solo career in the mid-1980s, exploring folk, pop and alternative country music without being defined by one genre. Her rich, expressive voice and stylistic experimentation allows her to move easily between the role of a chanteuse.

Her latest album, *Walls and Windows*, follows that same path with covers of tunes by such artists as Patty Griffin, Kim Richey, Eric Clapton and Van Morrison.

But these aren't just your same old songs. A self-described song interpreter, O'Connell uses her full-bodied alto voice to expose a range of emotions only hinted in the songs' original recordings and make each tune her own.

In "Long Ride Home," O'Connell's voice takes on a darker edge, strengthening the anger and bitterness of Griffin's lyrics. Combined with a driving acoustic guitar and a haunting fiddle, the track delves into the complexities of a spouse's death after 40 years of marriage.

O'Connell slows the tempo in Clapton's "I Get Lost," making the track more of an honest look at a romantic relationship than a forlorn reflection of one.

In "Blessing," O'Connell combines the words of a traditional Irish blessing with a little bit of blues. Amid uilleann pipes and funk-style bass, her voice alternates between gritty and tremulous, lending passion and credence to her words.

Whether you've heard the original artists perform the tunes in *Walls and Windows* or not, O'Connell's ability to

add new dimensions to each track makes the album worth the listen.

By Harmony Johnson

Mullet
Super Happy Fun Time
★★★★★

Somewhere between childish potty pranks and baffling stupidity lies Mullet, a band that has nothing to say but rants anyway.

With riffs that poorly imitate Blink-182 and "funny" lyrics that aren't even as witty as the Bloodhound Gang's, Mullet is a rambling band of immature brothers. Cracking jokes about every tasteless subject known to man, the band fails to deliver even the lowest of low-brow humor effectively.

Super Happy Fun Time is tragic, bouncing with poppy-punk attitude through 10 painful songs.

The band's improperly titled debut LP is proof that humanity has left some on the evolutionary chain's lower rungs. Sporting song titles like "Boobies" and "Wang," the album doesn't have much to say.

Though vocalist Mikey Lozano's twisted version of "Green Eggs and Ham" in "Boobie" draws a roaring laugh, its humor is childish and short-lived. After all, how many times can you hear a whiny, weak voice chanting "Boobies on a train/Boobies on a plane/Boobies here and there/Boobies everywhere" and still laugh?

Mixed in with the awful lyrics are boring and tuneless chords that sound like Blink-182 minus the talent. Mikey's guitar riffs are as simple as his lyrics are crass. He continually relies on elementary chords and predictable solos.

His two brothers Frankie and Adam support on the bass and drums, respectively. Their combined rhythm drags

without change through track after track, rarely diverting to support choruses about burps and prostitutes.

Only a few of the tracks represent a salvageable product, with "Rainy Day," being a somewhat emotional introspection. The band's reading of Dion's "Runaround Sue" is energetic, but Mullet had no business covering it. Regardless, it's still one of the best songs on the album—moderately catchy and tuneful.

Like being in a third grade bathroom listening to kids shout out all their newly learned cuss words, *Super Happy Fun Time* is silly, stupid and sickening. Mullet would do well to take the advice from one of its songs and "just pack your things and leave."

By Nick Parker

Deep Dish
Global Underground: Moscow
★★★★★

The Iranian-American DJ duo known as Deep Dish has truly proven that it's one of house music's elite by giving the world's dance community something tasty and creative.

DJs Ali ("Dubfire") and Sharam have already released some amazing dance mixes. But *Global Underground: Moscow* is the duo's first entry in the reputable double-disk *Global Underground* series, which presents the sets of some of the world's most famous DJs in different cities of the world.

With *Moscow*, Deep Dish strays a bit from the typical *Global Underground* style and the result is stunning. Instead of blending a little progressive house with a lot of faster, spacier trance, Deep Dish mixes a well-selected group of

tracks that maintain the steady beat which is characteristic of house music.

But the duo's work really deserves to be free of tidy categorization because its work sounds almost as good through a set of headphones as it does when heard on the floor of a club.

Moscow's first disk begins brilliantly as the dreamy undertones of 16B Featuring Morel's "Escape (Driving to Heaven)" morphs into the progressive "Rise" by Soul Providers featuring Michelle Shellers. Ali and Sharam establish an irresistible deep house groove that remains present as the music ventures into darker territory.

Disk two brings more vocals and harder, more metallic beats into the mix. Unlike most poorly made dance music, the set avoids excessive repetition by surrounding its intertwined rhythms with eerie, hypnotic sounds and melodies.

The album's cold nature reflects that of the city for which it's named. But while its mood is rarely light, the mix captivatingly blends funky, banging, erotic and serene beats. It's a crowning achievement in the dance music world, proving that *Global Underground: Moscow* is a truly unique experience.

By Elliott Dube

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