

BICKFORD & McENTIRE: A NEED TO TELL STORIES

Randy Bickford of *The Strugglers* and Heather McEntire of *Bellafea* are two area musicians who take their songwriting seriously.

Both artists' bands have toiled for the past three years, meticulously crafting new albums.

The results of all this hard work will be on full display this weekend as both records see their local releases.

Staff writer Jordan Lawrence talked (at length) with Bickford and McEntire in an attempt to discover the process by which the artists develop their songs.

Diversions: How does the writing process start for you?

Heather McEntire: I have all these unused words, so I just keep those in a folder next to my typewriter.

Lately we've been writing songs that have a little more space that allow me to get a little more busy on the guitar.

Randy Bickford: I think

all my songs start with phrase, usually a musical phrase, and that will give birth to a lyrical phrase.

It will kind of accrete. More stuff will kind of stick. The two are tethered together, and I'll slowly work through what I'm trying to say.

Songwriting is like sculpture for me. I'll start out with those two things and just keep working at it.

I'm kind of a slacker about a lot of things, but that's the one thing I'm really obsessed about. Just making sure that every line is distilled until it's like it were carved out of rock.

Dive: Where do you feel the inspiration comes from?

Heather: For me, I have such a sense of urgency in what I'm doing.

I had a rough year. And so there's a lot of inspiration, emotionally.

I always feel this urgency to document, and then getting to a point where you can't revise anymore.

Lyrical, I just sit in front of a typewriter.

There's something about writ-

ing on a typewriter. It almost edits itself. I'm very conscious of word choice and space and syntax and all that.

Randy: Maybe because it's so final. Like, "Bam!" — words are on paper.

Heather: I think people need to tell their stories. I try to dedicate myself to that theory, which means a lot of staying at home, writing.

Randy: Language is always the thing that inspires me.

The different connotations of words just gets me going. When I read lyrics by someone else and I see a cool line break or something, that messes with your expectations. That gets me excited and it makes the song go forward.

You can say so many things with language. It's so free. You're not nailed down to one interpretation. I love that.

Dive: So it's more of a challenge than an expression.

Randy: It's an expression of something in the back of my head that I don't know I'm trying to express until it comes out.

Heather: I think one of the most challenging aspects is making it so it's not like a diary.

I've been trying to focus on being a little more cryptic lyrically. I've been kind of focused on spirit.

Dive: Does it ever become an issue that maybe you're putting too much of yourself out there?

Heather: Yeah. I think that's what's humanizing about it.

Especially in a small town. I mean, my ex lives right over there. But I think you have to throw that out the window and let the song be.

It's not really about you; it's about these emotions. You're not the only person that's gone through them.

Randy: The personal, therapeutic part of it, that's only one facet.

There's also, you know, challenging yourself and trying to do different kinds of styles and do different things.

Heather: This is really interesting. I like talking about this. Keep going.

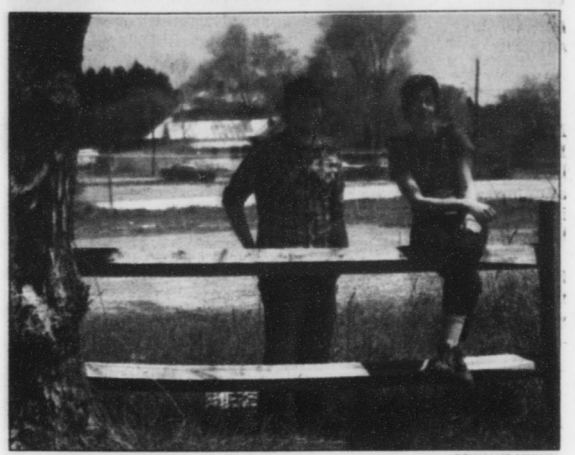
I think I might redefine everything I've thought about this.

Randy: You can't say that there's one intention that you have in writing a song.

For me it's trying to do something interesting with language, trying to express myself, trying to provide some kind of meaning that other people can relate to.

Otherwise, why are you putting it out there for people to hear?

Dive: So then what do the



Superlative songwriting is the weekend's star as both *The Strugglers* and *Bellafea* release new albums at Local 506. Friday and Saturday, respectively.

best songs do? Is it an emotional response from somebody, or something that makes someone go, "I can't believe they did something so awesome?" All of the above?

Randy: It's all of the above. It sounds like a cop-out, but that's the cool thing about music. There's someone you can like that's got great lyrics, like Leonard Cohen, and then there's somebody else —

Heather: Who can play the perfect jazz chord.

Randy: Yeah, something that's not verbal at all.

Heather: I think everyone has the potential to create. It's just the people who can really chisel it all down and really work on their craftsmanship.

When I know I've finished a song, it's like the snapshot. I can store the snapshot.

Maybe it takes you three years to finish an album. Maybe it takes you three minutes to finish a song, but when that picture is done, and you can show it and feel like this is that element, this is that song, that's when I know to stop.

Contact the Diversions Editor at dive@unc.edu.

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