

# Each song is a play for Cross

By JEFF GRIFFIN  
DTH Contributor

Mike Cross makes his living writing plays, plays which only last about three to five minutes. He performs these plays also—alone. That is, alone except for his guitar or fiddle.

Starting tools for a playwright, no doubt. But then, Mike Cross's music always pleasantly astonishes people.

Over the last four or five years, Cross has become a familiar figure to music lovers in Chapel Hill. Long-time Cross fans and new converts alike brave the elements for hours waiting in line to catch his monthly performances at the Cat's Cradle.

He's been referred to as a "poet" and a "clown." Writers trying to fit Cross and his music into capsule terms have labeled him a "mountain minstrel" and a "master storyteller, master musician." For convenience, he calls himself "hippie folksinger Mike Cross."

Mike Cross is all these things and more. He's a man with a remarkable insight into life; his lyrics display a vision that is seldom found in songs today. Cross's songwriting scope is not limited but refreshingly diverse. He writes serious, reflective songs like "Lord Let Me Die" and "Leon McDuff." His repertoire includes ironic songs which end with clever twists like "Elma Turl." "Little Ditches" treats death in a humorous vein.

Cross's songs spring from a variety of sources, ranging from "stories I heard at my great-grandfather's knee to little things I conjure up in the middle of the night." These ideas germinate in his mind, and a song eventually evolves. Of songwriting, Cross says, "The seed gets planted down in your subconscious, and if you're real lucky, you can open that little door between your conscious and subconscious, and the thing will flow right out."

This "master storyteller" brings the characters in his songs to life. When performing these songs, Cross is transformed seemingly into the character he is singing about. "When I sing 'Leon McDuff,' I try to become that old farmer when he speaks," Cross emphasizes with his characters and tries to project the image he feels they would project.

The personal touch comes through. Listening to Cross sing, one feels as though he is glimpsing at people's lives from the inside.

Mike Cross's songs don't fit the ordinary mold. He feels that "people are barraged with 'love me or leave me' or 'my heart is cracked,'" so love songs do not abound in his act. He has assumed the role of someone who will deal with other experiences.

The experience of dying is treated in several of his songs. "I figure death is as laughable as anything else in life." His songs about death have all been humorous because, Cross says, "I don't want people to be so concerned about it." "Disco Death" pokes fun at a brand of music which has become popular. "I didn't write it to try to capture the wave of the disco movement and



Mike Cross

catapult myself to fame and fortune."

Fame and fortune have never really concerned Mike Cross. "I've never had any aspirations to be a star," he says. "I just like being able to play music and making my living at it."

Music has not always been a major part of Mike Cross's life. As a youngster, growing up in Lenoir, he was "an intense, hard working, aspiring young golfer." He attended college here at UNC, but he says, "I really wasn't very interested in college, except as a location—a geographic spot where I could relate to a lot of people." Reflecting on his days at UNC, Cross says, "I see the flashing lights of pinball machines, the underside of barroom tables and countless, countless cans of beer."

Cross started playing guitar while he was a student at UNC as "an outlet, something to do." He soon began playing in small clubs around Chapel Hill as part of a folk duo. In 1972, he began to work as a solo act, on weekends.

Two years later, Cross and his wife, Laurie, moved to Atlanta, Ga., where he started law school. They continued to return to Chapel Hill once a month, so Cross could earn some money playing at local clubs. After the successful release of his first album, *Child Prodigy*, Cross left law school and began to play music full-time.

Cross is beginning to get more exposure by playing in various places along the East Coast. Although "basically a rocking chair cowboy," he says he is beginning to enjoy touring.

*Child Prodigy*, released last July, is selling well locally. Songs from it have gotten air play from radio stations all over the state. Cross has completed a new album, which

will be released soon.

Cross says he feels really good about the second album. It features more massive production and instrumentation. "It wasn't like going into the broom closet, singing some songs, then saying, 'Okay, see you next year.'" The new album reveals different aspects of Cross's musical taste and has lots of variety on it. "It touches all kinds of bases that I really like," he says.

Only rarely does a performer come along whose music transcends the barriers of age and trend. Mike Cross is such a performer—he offers pure, untamed entertainment.

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# Med students perform own musical comedy

By LIBBY LEWIS  
Staff Writer

Don Fidler is a myth-destroyer: a psychiatric resident who writes musical comedies can be nothing less. Ten years ago, a doctor who could be found anywhere between office and home (or the golf course on Wednesdays) was under suspicion.

Here at UNC, Fidler is only one of the medical students who are showing the other side of their talents—a side that has been hidden by years. "Medicine Show" is a full-scale musical, written and directed by Fidler, starring an assortment of medical students, secretaries and other NCMH regulars.

"It's easy to find talent in med school," Fidler says, "because administrative committees choose 'well-rounded' people—many of the castmembers have studied acting and singing, and about half of the musicians in the show are med students."

Fidler himself has a rock-solid background in the arts: he had his first professional acting job at age ten, in the out-door drama "Horn In The West." He's done summer stock, and that's not all of it. He studied acting, directing and playwriting as an undergraduate, and confesses that Doris Betts still has a strong hold on him—after taking creative writing with her. (After note: he was in the concert band, too.)

"Medicine Show" is Fidler's third production; for Student-Faculty Day, evolving from "Healer Man" in 1973 to "The Medicine Show" in 1975.

The show follows an apprentice's (Mike Parker) experience with the three "firsts"—the first physical (featuring a pelvic ballet), the first baby delivery and



Med students rehearse for the production of "Medicine Show," to be performed Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. Tickets are available at the Union desk, \$1 in advance, and \$1.25 at the door. Staff photo by Joseph Thomas.

the first death. Other castmembers include a stereotyped surgeon, played by Joe Horacek, who sings the "Surgical Blues"...

Up three days in a row, got home last night

Dog up and bite me, wife started to fight...

...a pregnant prostitute, played by Grey Therrington (when she's not lamenting her sad state in "Medicine Show," you can find her singing at Gryphon) and a seductive nurse, played by Patty Fisher.

The list goes on and on. But the show is running for two nights only in Memorial Hall. The show Friday night

at 8:00 is geared for the public; tickets are (\$1) a dollar in advance (at the Union desk) and \$1.25 at the door.

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