

## ON STAGE

# There's still no place like home for the Connells

## The Connells

Raleigh Civic Center

Friday, Sept. 22  
9 p.m.  
\$9.50

Tickets are still available at the Civic Center Box Office  
Call 755-6060 for more information

Can a local band find fame and fortune and still keep the same old magic onstage? When I asked the Connells' lead singer Doug MacMillan that question about Friday night's concert at the Raleigh Civic Center he said, "God, I hope so!"

While the Connells are no strangers to the college scene, this concert marks an important turning point in the group's career. The band, which was started five years ago by Michael Connell and his brother David while they were attending UNC, has worked its way up from appearances at fraternity parties and local bars to auditoriums the size of Raleigh's Civic Center.

Although some fans are concerned that success will change the Connells' home-town feel, the band members hope their attitude about the Triangle hasn't changed a bit. MacMillan said, "I'm glad I'm home."

The last thing the band wants, MacMillan said, is an uptight concert. He explained that when the Connells recently opened for The Church in a Washington, D.C. concert, the security guards made the fans sit down while they performed. This disappointed the group as much as it did the fans.

"It was like they were watching TV," MacMillan said. He added that it was just too hard for the band to create a personal atmosphere with the people sitting in the back rows. He went on to suggest that fans move up front Friday night.

While the Connells' audience consists mostly of college students, fans of all ages are expected to pour into the Civic Center Friday. MacMillan's grandmother, 89, will be there, so when the woman in front of you turns around and says, "That's my grandson," don't worry. A few kids from the local YMCA swim team that MacMillan coached may be there, too.

The band's reputation for relaxed, humorous concerts is well earned. When the Connells first started in 1984, it used bandmember George Huntley's VW van to haul basic equipment to local bars and parties. As its popularity grew, the Connells began charging admission to concerts in area clubs and auditoriums such as the Car's Cradle, the Brewery and Memorial Hall. Its lighting and stage presence improved also. Now, with a concert schedule including appearances in New York, Boston and Chicago, the Connells have moved up

LISA REICHLÉ

concert

to a Winnebago and the other creature comforts of success.

Along the way, the group has produced three well-crafted albums. First came *Darker Days*, which was produced in part by North Carolina native Don Dixon. The second, *Boylan Heights*, which was named for a suburb of Raleigh, was also produced by local talent Mitch Easter. The Connells have been promoting its latest, *Fun and Games*, since last spring. This third work offers a more polished and less acoustic sound without sacrificing the wit of its first efforts. The band is now working on new songs for its next album, and plans to start working in the studio after this concert. New videos are in the works as well.

But of course, how could a band with three Tar Heels go wrong? Bass guitarist David Connell and George Huntley, who performs on guitar, keyboards, and vocals, both attended UNC as undergraduates, while songwriter/guitarist Mike Connell boasts a UNC law degree.

Raleigh native Pelle Wimberly attended Hampton University in Hampton, Va., although he has roots in the Triangle through his father, who owns a Raleigh pharmacy. Vocalist Doug MacMillan swam for East Carolina University before transferring to N.C. State University. Although he never completed his studies, he is considering returning to college someday. "Yes, Pelle (Wimberly) and I are diplomaless," MacMillan said.

Another attraction Friday night will be Pylon, who R.E.M. calls "the best rock 'n' roll band in America." Bandmembers Randy Bewley (guitar), Vanessa Briscoe-Hay (vocals), Curtis Crowe (drums) and Michael Lachowski (bass) met as art students at the University of Georgia in Athens.

Performances at local college parties led to club dates, which led to New York, which led to a single, a tour and eventually its first album, *Gyrate* in 1980. The bandmembers went their separate ways in 1983 after the release of *Chomp*.

Now Pylon is back with a vengeance with *Hits*, a collection of all the old Pylon classics like "Cool," "Volume," "Crazy" and "M-Train." R.E.M. brought Pylon back into the public eye by playing a version of "Crazy" on almost every stop during its last tour. Pylon's comeback was also aided by a couple of "surprise" shows at the famed 40 Watt Club in its old stomping ground of Athens last year. Its new tour promises the same relentless tempo as the fans have come to expect. The group is currently opening for the Connells and various other artists to gear up for its tour with R.E.M. later this year.



The Pylons, rebuilding after their early 80s successes, open for the Connells Friday night

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