

Samples aren't always free — see these for \$5

The Samples with Gravity's Pull

Wednesday, April 22

Cal's Cradle

Tickets — \$5
For information, call 967-9053

We're for the people, in the sense that the record companies aren't for the people — they're for the money. That's not for me, and that's not for us — we're going to take the hard road," states Sean Kelly, lead singer and guitarist of the Samples, who play at Cat's Cradle this Wednesday.

Applause, applause and more applause, please, for the Boulder, Colorado-based quartet, who left Arista Records last year after the company started pushing the band to conform to Top 40's rules of music-making. Says drummer Jeep MacNichol, "Supposedly when we first signed with them they were starting some alternative department, but somewhere along the way that never happened." Leaving Arista on civil terms, Kelly, MacNichol, keyboardist Al Laughlin and bassist Andy Sheldon started their own indie record label, What Are Records (W.A.R.), based in New York, and just this month released their third album, *No Room*.

Born in 1988, the Samples took its first steps playing in any Boulder club that would let them set up. (The band got its name from the free food samples the boys grabbed from local groceries when they had no money.) Much to the band's delight, the boys instantly became local legends in the eyes of the fans, whom the band members are quick to acknowledge. "We really owe a lot to our fans, because it seems when people left Boulder for vacations or whatever, they'd bring our tapes with them and we got exposed nationwide," says MacNichol.

Legend has it that an Arista executive snagged one of those tapes and then signed the band, releasing their debut, *The Samples*, in late 1990. The album sold more than 50,000

KRISTI TURNBAUGH

Concert

copies, but as Arista started meddling with the group's songs for the second album, the boys, all in their mid-twenties, bid adieu and hit the road. Upon fans' requests for more music, and proving that their spirits weren't broken, the Samples independently released an eight-song EP, *Underwater People*, guest starring Branford Marsalis. With the help of Rob Gordon, who backed the recent successful promotions of Queensryche and Red Hot Chili Peppers, the band has just released the 14-song album, *No Room*.

O.K., so I guess this is the point where you've grown impatient, wondering just what the Samples sounds like. I've been avoiding a musical analysis because the Samples' music isn't easily definable.

As singer Kelly explains, "There's really no label for our music. I'm glad you can't describe it and say this is exactly what it is." The band calls their style "a mixture of reggae, folk and melodic," but the sound is definitely rock-oriented. Without being too analytical, the band immediately reminds me of the Police, with its prominent reggae rhythms and most particularly, Kelly's lead vocals. This guy sounds so much like Sting it's spooky. I mean, it could have been Sting on a few of the new songs, most notably "Another Disaster" and "Did You Ever Look So Nice." Kelly actually welcomes the Sting comparison, remembering how his vocal style emerged: When I played coffee houses, I wasn't the kind of person who would say, "Would everybody please shut up, I'm trying to sing!" Instead, I tried to sing above the audience without sounding too bad. Then they'd listen."

A listen is what the Samples deserves. Annoyed by the sugary-sweet, empty tunes that clog the airwaves today (and aren't we all?), the boys write socially conscious lyrics full of '60s-like messages that apply to '90s' problems and with infectious grooves.

On *No Room*'s "Seany Boy," the



A sample of the Samples.

band hits home with the all-too-familiar issue of educational drop-outs, with Kelly crying, "Seany Boy, you'd better get your butt in school." The older, gripping "Ocean of War," although recorded before the Gulf War erupted, served as a timely reminder of the tragedy of using violence to supposedly solve problems: "Nothing was learned/from that lesson before/ We're a traveling mass/with a memory loss/While the army men roll/But still gathering moss/Nothing was learned/ Every highway has turned/onto winding avenues/To a black wall/there carved onto."

Classic tunes like "African Ivory," which, you guessed it, exposes the realities of butchering elephants for jewelry making, and "Close To Fires," focusing on Native American Indian rights, may seem preachy, but the band insists it doesn't use music as a soapbox. "We just try to have a positive impact. We're not telling people to recycle, we're just holding up a mirror, showing people the world and letting them decide," says former member Charles Hambleton.

But for those who choose not to

wallow in society's shortcomings, the band says that it's okay that some fans come to the shows just to dance. So whether you decide to live your life by their lyrics or just want to get down, the Samples offers both, guaranteed to be "raucous and thrashy... spontaneous... fresh... with a taste of everything."

Kudos to a band that insists on maintaining its artistic integrity for its own sake, refusing to succumb to the money-hungry robots of mainstream radio.

For YOUR own sake, turn off G105 for a night, venture down to Cat's Cradle this Wednesday and treat yourself to a sampling of the Samples.

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