

THE BATTALION
AGGIELIFE

The Connells hope for a hit

North Carolina band aims for success with roots-rock sound

BY MICHAEL SCHAU
THE BATTALION

The members of the Connells have been together 12 years, released six albums and seen a recent single become an international smash hit.

So it comes as no surprise that drummer Peele Wimberley is a little tired of being compared to a certain band from Athens, Ga.

"Certainly we get tired of it," he said, "but we all understand. People have to have some perception of the sound."

Comparisons to R.E.M., as well as to Minnesota rockers The Replacements, have followed the band since it originated in 1984.

"I hate to describe our sound," Wimberley said, "but I would say it's like R.E.M. with a little more British flavor and maybe a little more of the rootsy stuff."

The band, based in Raleigh, N.C., plays at the Dixie Theatre in downtown Bryan at 10 p.m. Thursday. Rock band Tonic will open.

"It's a pretty strong package," Wimberley said. "Tonic is a strong band."

The Connells' tour follows the release of the band's latest album, *Weird Food & Devastation*, a raw, slightly acerbic collection of guitar-driven pop tunes.

"I think the album's darker, more solemn," Wimberley said. "We didn't do a lot of overdubs or processing, and that made it sound a little more raw."

The title of the album refers to the band's impressions of touring Europe, where it has encountered immense popularity following a 1993 single.

The song "74-'75," from their 1993 album *Ring* was a top-20 hit in 13 countries. Americans may have missed the buzz surrounding the song, although it was featured in the recent movie *Heavy*.

Wimberley said the members of the band say they still hope for increased popularity in the United States.

"We want to reach as many people as possible," he said. "Aside from the European success, we're all just scraping by."

The Connells' relative obscurity in their native country is not because of lack of experience. The band formed at the University of North Carolina after brothers Mike and David Connell hired vocalist Doug MacMillan and drummer John Schultz to play at local venues.

Schultz was replaced by Wimberley shortly thereafter, and the band hired George Huntley be-



The Connells, a rock band from North Carolina, is playing tonight at the Dixie Theater in Bryan.

fore recording their debut album, *Darker Days*. The Connells released three more albums before the breakthrough album *Ring*, the best-selling independent rock album of 1993. Wimberley said the band members are planning a future release.

"When we get to work on the next record, we're going to concentrate on making a solid pop record like *Fun & Games* or *One Simple Word*," he said. The loose sound of *Weird Food & Devastation* is a departure from the more polished pop tunes of the band's previous albums.

"Most fans say that when they spend time with it, they like it a lot," Wimberley said.

The album includes hints of alternative country in such songs as "Smoke" and "Back to Blue," but the influence of rockers like Neil Young is still evident in "Friendly Time," he said.

Wimberley said the band is progressing both lyrically and musically.

"The lyrics are a little more direct, more pointed," he said.

The band's familiar sense of irony is somewhat less cloaked on *Weird Food & Devastation*. In "Back to Blue," MacMillan sings, "Ain't it fun-

ny / How it really ain't funny at all?" Each of the band members contributed songs to the album. Wimberley wrote "Any," a ballad with a slight blues influence.

"I always go back to old Stevie Wonder, Earth Wind & Fire, be-bop stuff," Wimberley said. If the album fails to bring the band the popularity it has enjoyed overseas, the band will continue to work for radio airplay.

"On radio, you've got to get to the chorus in seconds," Wimberley said. "It's kind of irritating. This could be the year the band's wishes come true. One single, "Fifth Fret," has been released, and the band's "Bitter Pill" is featured in the horror movie *Scream*.

The Connells' tour has also been going well, Wimberley said. The show in Bryan will be the band's first in the area, coming on the heels of a stint at Austin's Liberty Lunch.

"I'm excited about coming down here," Wimberley said.

The band members still wish for a successful tour, but the band also has other desires, as well.

"Most of our songs have really good hooks," Wimberley said. "We'd like to have a hit."



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WEEKEND PREVIEW

Thursday January 30

Steve O'Neill, a rock singer from Albuquerque, N.M., is playing at Chelsea Street Pub and Grill at 9 p.m.

Thread, an alternative rock band from Bryan-College Station, is playing with **Half-Life**, an alternative rock band from Bryan-College Station, at the Cow Hop at 9:30 p.m.

Vertical Horizon, a folk band from Washington, D.C., is releasing its latest album at Marooned Records at 4 p.m.

Friday January 31

MSC Town Hall is sponsoring a lunch box concert, "Hot Bands, Hot Chocolate," featuring Fysher, a rock band from Bryan-College Station, at Rudder Fountain at 12 p.m.

Freudian Slip, an improvisational comedy act, is performing at the Dixie Theatre at 10 p.m.

Fysher, a rock band from Bryan-College Station, is playing with **Vertical Horizon**, a folk band from Washington, D.C., at 3rd Floor Cantina at 8 p.m.

Saturday February 1

W.C. Clark, a blues musician from Austin, is playing at 3rd Floor Cantina at 8 p.m.

Freudian Slip, an improvisational comedy act, is performing at the Dixie Theatre at 10 p.m.

Infinite Record Convention will be held at the College Station Ramada from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Steve O'Neill, a rock singer from Albuquerque, N.M., is playing at Chelsea Street Pub and Grill at 9 p.m.

Reckless Kelly, a rock band from Austin, is playing with **David's Gate**, a rock band from Bryan-College Station, and **Inspector 12**, a rock band from Bryan-College Station, at the Cow Hop at 9:30 p.m.

Sneaky Pete, a sing-a-long artist from Bryan-College Station, is performing at Burton Creek at 8 p.m.

Texas Twisters, a rock band from Bryan-College Station, is playing at Fitzwilly's at 9:30 p.m.

Ty & the Semiautomatics, a rock band from Houston, is playing at Sweet Eugene's House of Java at 9:30 p.m.

Dean's legacy lives on at StageCenter

BY MELANIE BENSON
THE BATTALION

StageCenter live theater, located at 701 N. Main in Bryan, is showing the revised TV production *Come Back To The Five and Dime Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean*, written by Ed Grazyk.

The setting for the production, McCarthy, a small West Texas town where time has stood still.

The story concerns a reunion of women, once known as The Dimples of James Dean, who promise to come back to honor his death.

While celebrating the 20th anniversary of the death of their father in a five and dime store, the actresses get a little too thick as truth is revealed.

Before long, the beer is ice cold, tongues run loose and the ladies all hang out, says the play's director, Cathy McWhorter.

"In 20 years, lives change, changes and history changes, but the friends they made stay the same—or do they?" McWhorter said.

The show will be running Jan. 31 and Feb. 6-8. Tickets are \$7 for students and senior citizens, \$8 for adults and \$4 for children.

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