

Bluegrass band gains local audience; plans further developments in style

By Pat Higgins

Cold Spring is a four-piece bluegrass band based in Lincoln that has been playing the bar circuit for the last year. The members include Mike Botts on banjo, Gary Paul on bass, Marty Coniglio on mandolin and Mike Keefe on guitar.

"Cold Spring started out as a full-time group last 4th of July at the Brownville festival, where we did well in the competition they were having," said Keefe. "But for a couple of years prior to that we had basically the same people playing together trying to form a band."

profile

Cold Spring credits the development of a strong local scene in Lincoln for its growth.

"There are six or seven really good bluegrass bands in town but unfortunately there are not enough places to play," Keefe said. "Probably the best for us is Bob's Tavern in Havelock where we spent last weekend. The crowd there already seems to get drunk, loud, and obnoxious, especially when Marty starts telling Havelock jokes."

"The last few months we were playing a lot of different places around the state but out there they didn't seem as receptive as people are in Lincoln," he said. "We would be more interested in playing more parties and at informal gatherings rather than strictly at bars, maybe bar mitzvahs or rodeos."

Movie benefits

The *Urban Cowboy* movie and attendant media coverage have worked to the benefit of some groups.

"I think all that *Urban Cowboy* proved was that they knew how to use advertising," Keefe said. "The only fringe benefit for us is that people who like country would become interested in bluegrass because they are directly related. If you can dance to country swing, bluegrass is easy."

Both Keefe's and Paul's brothers are members of area bluegrass hotshots the Sandy Creek Pickers, and Keefe credits them for inspiration.

"I was tired of what was new in rock and roll, although lately I've been getting into the Clash," he said, "so I started listening to the acoustic stuff that Steven Hanson and my brother were doing. I like bluegrass because it is deliberately noncommercial. You'll never hear it on the radio."

Bluegrass can trace its roots back a considerable distance.

"Bill Monroe is usually given credit for putting together modern bluegrass," Keefe said. "He took elements of Irish and Scottish fiddle tunes, gospel and blues and put it together. The instrumentation is so unique because the mandolin is used as a rhythm instrument."

Evolving style

Cold Spring plans on an evolution in style. "All four members of the band would like to be moving in the same musical direction," Keefe said. "We would like to be doing songs along the lines of the Newgrass Revival, who

are a really interesting group as they almost sound like a rock band at times. Maybe we would also throw in some originals or Fugs material. Marty has been writing a few tunes."

Cold Spring has picked some classic American themes for inspiration.

"We like to do train songs, truck driving songs, instrumentals and songs to plant gardens by," Keefe said. "We try to emphasize our harmony singing more than anything else. We also may go for a little more variety and perhaps use electric bass or guitar for some country numbers. I'm also interested in Tex-Mex like the Sir Douglas Quintet."

Cold Spring has some interesting ambitions for the future.

"We have no plans for recording an album," Keefe said, "but we would like to send a tape along on the next space shuttle flight."

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