



Dave Bentz/Daily Nebraskan

DIVERSIONS

NEW BRASS GUNS SHY

BY CHARLES LIEURANCE

There's this story that Cameron Crowe, renowned rock critter and author of "Fast Times at Ridgemont High," tells about an interview he was having with David Bowie on the 15th floor of one building or another. Apparently it was one of those nightmare interviews that sometimes occurs when the artist has just discovered the mystical pleasures of Krishna or toured Tibet and found that slapping a bloated yak's bladder with a petrified herring makes the same sound as a timpani. Crowe and Bowie were discussing Brecht and Ziggy Stardust when Bowie insisted he saw a body fall past the window. The interview was downhill from that point on.

Although the interview with Lincoln's newest band, the New Brass Guns, had potential nightmare written all over it, somehow things worked out. I had a compound fracture of the

tibia and a cast up to my thigh. I was strung out on Valium and pain pills. Three members of the four-piece band made it over to my apartment, and Brian Barber, the group's drummer, called up lead singer Lori Allison on the phone. She was suffering from one of those flus that crafty Asians sent our way to break U.S. morale and had just vomited. Barber relayed my questions to her over the phone and then gave me the answers. If he didn't understand my Valium-induced inquiries, he made me yell them across the room into the phone receiver.

Once we got past questions like "What's your major?" and "Which one of you is the guitarist again?" we started to make headway.

Two Saturdays ago Brian Barber, Lori Allison, Marty Amsler and Doug Hubner played live for the first time as the New Brass Guns, opening for the best new original band in Lincoln, 13 Nightmares in the Neihardt Pub. When they speak of that performance, Amsler (bass) and Hubner (guitar and "big pile of stuff") frequently use phrases like "petrified," "mental block," "nervous," "learning experience" and "clumsy."

This was the first time they had played and yet, with a solid set full of original tunes, they proved what fellow local musician Mark Harper has been saying for years — that in the closets, practice rooms, bathrooms, warehouses, basements and garages of Lincoln there is enough original and creative material being written, recorded and played to make this city another Athens, Ga. or Minneapolis.

Now another great band, still on the legs of a foal, has entered the scene. Although their show at the Pub may have suffered from stage paralysis, the promise represented by the music itself was evident. New Brass Guns have written 13 versatile, inventive alternative pop songs. Not a cover tune in sight for the duration of the performance, unless you count a romantic poem culled from a 1700s

newspaper and set to music. As with any good original band, it's hard to tell where the New Brass Guns are coming from musically. Guitarist Hubner seems to have come up with a style somewhere between U2's Edge and early Peter Dinklage, with an inspired amateurism that makes the sound entirely his own. Barber, who used to play guitar for the Go Bats, is, to my knowledge, Lincoln's only stand-up drummer, beating on the rockabilly setup of snare, cymbal and "assorted thrift-store surprises." Amsler's bass is the accelerator, holding fragile song structures together.

'When you're playing original songs, no one can tell when you screw up anyway.'

—Amsler

And then there's Allison, who was formerly singer for the Go Bats and used to do a killer version of Willie John's "Fever" while dressed in a Girl Scout uniform and a pair of faux pearl-handled toy six guns. In the Guns, Allison's gorgeous voice is put to more creative use — balanced between tenuous sentimentality on the slower ballads and ominous deadpan on the band's more experimental songs. Here is a voice capable of invoking almost any mood with the slightest tremor in pitch or even a change in facial expression.

The Guns, by their own admission, are amateurs. Amsler and Hubner have spent the last two years just learning how to play their instruments and sometimes taking a month to write one song.

"Except for Lori, none of us in the band is doing what they normally do," Amsler said.

Barber is by nature a guitarist. He says he's

still having some trouble keeping a steady beat and still gets blisters and cuts as he drums.

"But because he's also a guitarist he becomes more a part of the song, more a part of the music, and not just the rhythm" Hubner says. "He knows what we're doing with the chords and stuff."

Amsler's hands still cramp up on certain chords and sometimes he'll play a chord when he meant to be picking. But Amsler feels that his amateurism on guitar keeps his guitar style fresh. He doesn't feel like he's imitating anyone.

"When you're playing original songs, no one can tell when you screw up anyway," Amsler said.

Although it's Allison's job to get the words across to people, she feels that how it sounds is more important than whether or not the audience comprehends everything.

"I don't really think people listen to words a lot. In fact, I know they don't. The lyrics are more so we can feel passionate about the song. Writing them doesn't have anything to do with the audience understanding them," Allison said.

"People would probably misunderstand the words even if they heard them," she said.

By this time the Valium had me asking questions like "Could you tell me what the show 'Route 66' is really about?" so I decided to go for the big question before bodies started raining past the window — or Lori had to vomit again.

"How would you classify your music?" I asked, my vision starting to tunnel.

"Speed metal with a country twist."

Here's to the new Athens.

The New Brass Guns — that's the ancient cowboy word for Nebraska, by the way — will perform this Saturday night above Buchanan's in the Haymarket with 13 Nightmares and Too Many Daves.