

## Ordinary band produces extraordinary music



### Concert review

The plain blue bus, as inconspicuous as the band it carried, took up three parking spaces in front of the AfterShock club Tuesday afternoon.

The Connells, six average, ordinary musicians, had come to town.

"We're just a normal band," George Huntley, The Connells' guitarist and backup singer, said. "We finally got that across to our record label. They were worried because we didn't really have an image."

Mike Connell, a guitarist from Georgia who founded the band 10 years ago with his brother David, agreed with Huntley.

"Our label wanted us to try to define for them how we saw ourselves, but we never obliged them, because we don't have a very clear idea about that," Mike Connell said. "We never really thought about it."

"We were just a group of guys who never saw any point in trying to dress any differently than if we were going over to our parents' house."

The result of remaining true to themselves is a college image — entirely uncalculated, Connell said.

"A few of us look a little more clean-cut and normal than others," Connell said. "But I wouldn't say Doug MacMillan looks normal by any standards."

Bespectacled lead singer MacMillan, with a wild stand of short hair, is fan-friendly and funny. On stage, his soprano voice possesses a dreamlike quality that contrasts with his actions. When he's not waving

and shaking a tambourine, one hand grips the microphone stand as if shifting gears on a bus.

The drummer, Peele Wimberley, wears wire-rimmed glasses, steel-toed black boots, a flannel shirt and torn jeans. He sports a close buzz cut and remnants of a beard.

"Peele's probably the coolest looking one in the band," Connell said.

Most of the time, Wimberley was hidden behind his drum set, dishing out a strong yet unobtrusive beat.

Although the "ordinary look" has always been a part of the band, quality is something they had to strive for.

Mike Connell, who wrote the popular song, "'74-'75," remembered when The Connells played in Lincoln ... '86-'87.

"My only qualms about that night was the way we played. We were terrible," he said.

The Connells have come a long way, and not only in terms of mileage. They've released five albums.

"The first time we played in Lincoln, we'd only been together a year or two. We needed to mature as a band," Connell said.

At AfterShock during the 90-minute set, which included "Doin' You," "Disappointed," "Spiral" and "Slackjawed," the now-mature band whipped fans into an over-the-head hand-clapping frenzy.

Huntley, the band's token long-hair, impressed the crowd with his harmonizing and singing, as well as his above-average guitar-playing. In the opening notes of the encore song, the rich, ringing tone of Huntley's eclectic guitar unmistakably mimicked a harmonica.

Keyboardist Steve Potak, a normal-looking guy with short dark hair, also proved outstanding. His keyboards sounded as big as the Hammond



Doug MacMillan of The Connells autographs a band poster for Suzie York, a Twisters employee. The band appeared at Twisters on 14th and O streets Tuesday afternoon before their concert at the AfterShock club.

organ he usually plays on stage. Potak excelled in conjuring sounds ranging from an entire horn section to a soft vocal hum of a chorus.

David Connell's four-string Fender bass was never silent, as his left hand slid quickly, smoothly, up and down the neck of his guitar.

Mike Connell played an assortment of Gibson guitars, including a Chet Atkins Gibson, which replicated an acoustic sound, during the song "'74-'75."

"Me and David are so damn ordinary looking," Connell said. "It can't be helped. If I tried to be any different,

it would be a joke."

It's no joke, however, that The Connells, touring in their ordinary bus, covering nearly 10,000 miles this month, will perform with 13 Engines on April 12 at the Omaha Ranch Bowl.

— Jill O'Brien



Brian Curtis, lead singer and guitarist for Straw Dog, jams with bassist Michael Wells at their concert at Duffy's on Easter.

## Straw Dog has eclectic bark

By Joel Strauch  
Senior Reporter

They might be made of straw, but it would take some mighty huffing and puffing to blow this band in.

The three-man band Straw Dog opened for the Sissies Sunday night, playing to a solid crowd at Duffy's on Easter.

Why only three?

Straw Dog bassist Michael Wells said, "We started out with five and then went down to four and then three."

"We've found that three works the best for us."

Three is enough. Straw Dog played with enough vigor and intensity to match the performance of a much larger band. To find a name that fit

their energetic style, Straw Dog turned to history.

"In 16th-century China, straw effigies known as straw dogs were thrown into the river to appease the gods," Wells said.

"Straw Dog was also a really violent and gory movie in the '70s, which appealed to the other guys," said Wells, a senior secondary education major at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

The "other guys" are guitarist/vocalist Brian Curtis and percussionist Scott Halverson.

Curtis, a senior sociology major at UNL, said the band just finished recording a 12-track album with Serious Fish Studios. The album is in the process of being mastered. Recording the album was a great experience, he

said.

"We cut it in a friend's basement," Curtis said. "It was very relaxed."

Halverson, a child counselor in Council Bluffs, said that while they recorded they "ate a lot of junk food and drank a lot of beer."

The band is kicking around possible names for the new album.

"We're thinking about Perigrine and Tequila for a title, but nothing is solid yet," Curtis said.

Wells said the album would be out in early June.

With Halverson in Council Bluffs and at least one gig a week, the band has some difficulty finding time to practice.

## Story of brothers' rivalry told through violence, toast



By Paula Lavigne  
Senior Reporter

A wasteland of typewriter corpses laid abused and dented beyond recognition. After several vicious blows with a 9-iron, their hallowed cavities gathered alongside a few toasters in what resembled an appliance grave.

They are all victims of Sam Shepard's play, "True West," which will be performed at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Studio Theatre this weekend.

"True West," directed by theater graduate student Randall Wheatley, digs into America's contemporary values, sibling rivalry and a lot of toast.

"It is an incredible story of a relationship between two brothers, almost a Cain and Abel story," he said, "with the antagonism and sibling rivalry two brothers feel."

One brother, Austin (Chris Williford), lives at his mother's house and dreams of making it big in Hollywood screenwriting. He is visited one day by his brother Lee (Devon Schumacher). Lee is a drunken drifting "desert rat."

When a Hollywood agent (Dave Landis) comes to accept Austin's script, Lee uses a golf game and some sweet talk to con the agent into accepting his "script" instead. The roles are reversed and reversed again in a dizzying display of intensity and violent rage in their mother's (Sandy Fisher) kitchen.

"In the process of the play, an amazing transformation takes place

between the two brothers, and they metamorphose and change roles," he said. "Essentially they lose themselves, and they become just one big jumbled mess of a personality that explodes."

"The play climaxes in an incredible explosion on stage of toast and violence and strangulation and typewriters," he said. "It's as if cars had collided on stage after the play."

Wheatley said the play had a deeper meaning than just brotherly love, though.

"The story deals with our values as Americans, our romantic mythical notion of the West, the truth of what the West is — a Hollywood facade," he said. "We want our heroes, our violence, our danger, but we want it on our television sets and not in our homes."

"This play is a microcosm of what goes on in the world," he said. "It's also comic in a dark sense."

Schumacher said his role as the scrounging older brother added to this dark comedy.

"He comes home searching for something he wasn't able to find out in the desert," he said. He said the action was what made his role enjoyable.

"You kind of expect in a movie to see things get broken and things get messy, but you don't see that much on stage," he said. "Doing violence is always a challenge, though, because you want to make it look real, but you want it to be safe."

Wheatley promises the audience will be safe and "in and out the door and in a bar with a sense of redemption by 10" for a "classic tale of brotherly love and toast."

"True West" premieres tonight at 8 at the Studio Theatre. Additional showings are April 8 through 10 with 2 p.m. matinees being added to the April 9 and 10 shows. Tickets are \$2 at the door.

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