

Cuz's Corner

By Dennis Frost

Welcome to the very first official edition of Cuz's Corner for the year 2010. Here's hoping that that all of you had a wonderful holiday season and are looking forward to yet another stellar year in music. It occurs to me that the music scene around these parts is very much a metaphor for life itself in that usually the demise of venues or promoters presenting roots music are fortunately replaced by the birth of new ones – the life-death- rebirth cycle. OK, I must admit that I was very much bummed in learning that Zack and the crew were closing the doors of the **Neighborhood Theatre** at the end of March. The word is that a year of a bad economy coupled with new, deep-pocketed competition led to the difficult decision. Well folks, it looks like the movement to save the theater had positive results and after a groundswell of community support, the NODA institution will live on! This scare put me in a nostalgic mood about the Neighborhood Theatre and what it has meant to the roots music family through the years. I remember fondly the very first show Paul McBroom and Sharon Pate presented at the theater – **Peter Rowan and Tony Rice**. I also remember, perhaps less fondly, the large claw foot tub upstairs that served as the temporary men's urinal before the permanent restrooms were built downstairs – ah, the memories! Through the years, my wife, Carolyn, and I have not only heard an amazing amount of great music there, but many of the friends we have to this day were made in the shadows of Paul McBroom's "trickle down theory" sculpture. That funky lobby has been a catalyst for a good deal of old-fashioned community building

through the years. Hats off to Paul, Sharon, Zack, Gary, Mike, Ellen and all the others that have given the building a vibe, a spirit, and a soul all these years!

There is an exciting new venue to tell you guys about if great sound, an intimate listening experience, and excellent lighting are your cup of tea. I would highly recommend attending a show in the newly opened **Stage Door Theater**

tucked behind Belk Theater in the Blumenthal Center for the Arts. It's my understanding that the Stage Door occupies a space also used as a rehearsal room for the larger productions that come to Belk Theater. The room holds approximately 150 and the combination of the black curtains and Chinese lanterns give it a cozy, big city feel much like those off-Broadway theaters in New York City. Actually, there are three amazing shows coming up at the Stage Door that would provide an opportunity to experience this fantastic new space. Scheduled for February are banjo virtuoso **Tony Trischka** on the 19th, blues singer-songwriter **Ruthie Foster** on the 23rd and Cuz's gig of the month, **Dave Alvin with Christy McWilson and Cindy Cashdollar** on the 26th. Dave Alvin is a living legend and his brand of California blues/folk/rock 'n' roll is a best kept secret among the general music populace. This show will be in support of his **Dave Alvin and the Guilty Women** disc that was re-

leased last year – this is a no miss in this intimate setting! (www.maxxmusic.com)

Looking ahead into March, The Charlotte Folk Society will be presenting one of the most amazing traditional Celtic bands coming out of Ireland today. **Dervish** is a six member band that not only features tight instrumentals and marvelous arrangements, but features one of the most respected vocalists in traditional Irish music, Cathy Jordon. Advance tickets are a reasonable \$19 and this should be a show not

to miss in CFS's home, The Great Aunt Stella Center. There will be two full sets of the best in Irish music beginning at 7:30 on March 3. Please check the band out at www.folksociety.org, where you can also purchase tickets. Tickets are \$23 at the door, so don't procrastinate! Your support of these ticketed shows and our gatherings will allow

CFS to keep great folk music flowing into Charlotte, so let's kick off the "green month" together!! Also, please don't forget Piedmont blues legend **John Dee Holeman** will be performing at our next Gathering on Friday, February 12. This is yet another no-miss performance and is indicative of the variety of roots and traditional music CFS brings to the Stella Center!

One negative of the holiday season, from my perspective, is the lack of releases other than Christmas CDs. As always, around the middle of January the studios open the tap and the new music begins to flow. **The Dave Rawlings Machine's** new disc **A Friend of a Friend** captured my attention right off the bat. In fact, during my first listening, (Continued on page 14.)



"Cuz" and Little Bit

(Cuz's Corner, continued from page 13.)

there was that feeling of sitting by the woodstove with a long-time friend. Dave Rawlings has been best known as **Gillian Welch's** guitarist and partner in crime for the last twelve years and it's hard to believe this is his first solo project. Just think of this disc as a Gillian Welch record in reverse. Just like a Gillian Welch recording, this one explores the byways of stringband music, vintage country, and bluegrass, and reinvents these genres during the process into something altogether new and fresh. This one would normally be Cuz's pick of the month but for the fact a gift from God dropped into my hands over the weekend in the form of a new **Patty Griffin** gospel recording.

Downtown Church was lovingly produced by the great **Buddy Miller** at the Nashville Downtown Presbyterian Church live and at his home studio and includes mostly traditionals with a couple of Patty Griffin tunes thrown in for good measure. If you combine one of the best vocalists in folk music with Buddy Miller's genius and include guest vocalists like the **McCrary sisters, Julie Miller, Emmylou Harris, Raul Malo, Buddy Miller, Mike Farris**, and others I think you get the picture. Before listening, I was a bit concerned as to how much I would enjoy the disc, not because of the gospel content, but because of the fact that I would miss those Patty Griffin songs. I sincerely feel she is one of the special poets in folk and country music. As soon as the rendering of **House of Gold** settled into my soul, I knew my concerns were for naught! This is just a beautiful disc and I cannot recommend it enough – sorry Dave, but this one is Cuz's pick of the month with a big explanation mark! I just hate it when words don't give justice to

the excellence of a recording, but perhaps, that's just the way it should be.

E.C Ball and his wife Orna made some of the most original and endearing country music recorded in the 1930s. Hailing from the tiny village of Rugby in southwestern Virginia (Wayne Henderson's home), they blazed a new path in country music that has been captured in the **Face a Frowning World** tribute disc. The Balls are lovingly covered by the likes of **Rayna Gellert (Uncle Earl), The Handsome Family, Michael Hurley, Jolie Holland (Be Good Tanyas), Jon Langford** and many others. I seldom like each and every cut on a disc of this kind, but overall, I feel this one is a keeper.

Finally, songwriter, producer, instrumentalist extraordinaire **Will Kimbrough's** latest release is a satisfying one. **Wings** also has that warm, comforting feel to it, much like the David Rawlings disc. For some reason, Will's tunes and his consciousness always pick me up and drop me off on a higher plane. If Nashville can be saved from the ravages of runaway commercialism, I feel it's creative geniuses like Will that will make a huge impact in their time in this plane.

This Cuz's Corner is dedicated to all the musical greats we lost last year, as well as my twenty-year-old dog, Tumbleweed, who we lost this last week – they gave us much joy and all will be deeply missed.

Yours in music,

Cuz

To share with Cuz about your favorite music, contact him at 704-532-8846 or dcmfrost@mindspring.com.