

Blues and groovin' tunes swing by Wild Duck

■ The North Mississippi Allstars visit Eugene this Friday for an energetic and enthusiastic show

By Rebecca Wilson
Oregon Daily Emerald

Trapped in an organic cocoon of Birkenstock-wearing fog, denizens of Eugene sometimes have a hard time remembering the rest of America: the food, the footwear, the sunshine and, most importantly, the music. This Friday, take a musical pilgrimage east to the Mid-South and experience the Delta culture and groovin' tunes of the North Mississippi Allstars at the Wild Duck.

Brothers Luther and Cody Dickinson are the masterminds behind the band. The two grew up on the North Mississippi Hill Country, south of Memphis. The region is saturated with generations of families who play their distinctive regional music in churches and juke joints. The Dickinsons absorbed the culture from early childhood, but they had a little extra help. Their father is legendary producer, artist and sideman Jim Dickinson, who is best known for his work with the Rolling Stones, Aretha Franklin and Ry Cooder.

Luther is responsible for vocals and slide guitar and Cody plays drums. Their friend Chris Chew

rounds out the group with fleet-fingered bass playing and vocal harmonies he learned in his Baptist church during his childhood. All three musicians say they embrace their musical forebears rather than rebelling against them.

"Blues was part of our environment," said Luther in a July 28, 2000 interview with the Chicago Tribune. "What a great thing to be a little kid and be able to meander through an awesome record collection like my dad's."

The Dickinsons' eclectic taste in music eventually focused into a passion for playing the blues. In an interview the July 10, 2000 Time, Luther explained that at first he struggled with the concepts of blues guitar. But "once that vibration got inside me," he said, "it was over."

Then one night in 1996, Luther had an epiphany: "The whole thing just came to me. We're gonna play electric versions of these old acoustic tunes and call ourselves the North Mississippi Allstars." The band made their debut in a Memphis punk club.

According to Time, the band "radiated so much talent, innocence and enthusiasm that an impressive roster of stars," including Lucinda Williams and Beck, have asked one or both of the Dickinsons to jam.

Despite their good intentions, the band's style quickly evolved from the

traditional blues sound. "I don't proclaim to be in a blues band," Luther told the Tribune. "Our sound is what happens whenever young white kids play try to play older black music. It becomes rock 'n' roll."

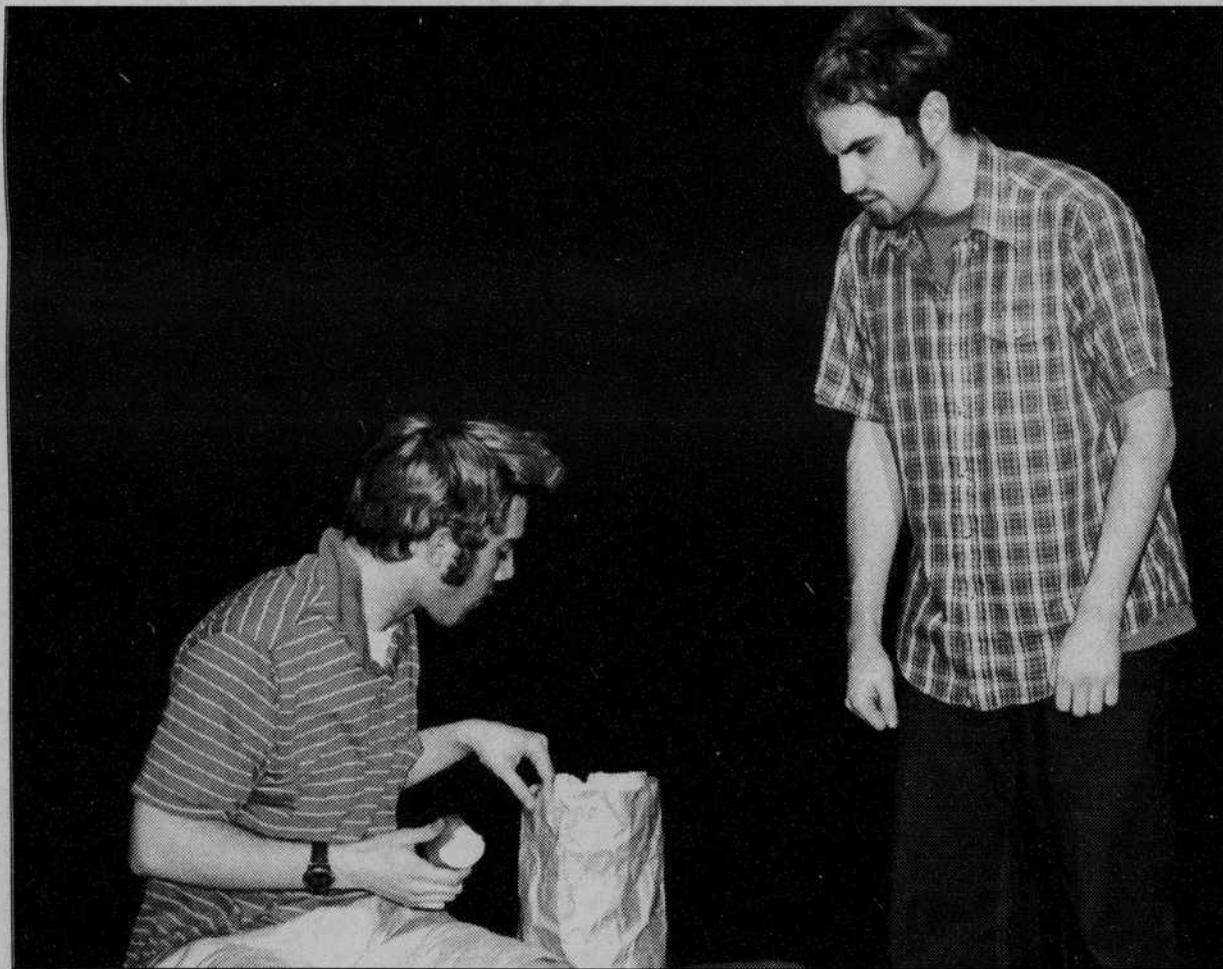
The North Mississippi Allstars are certainly appealing to more than just blues fans, said Dave Bartlett, the vice-president of Tone-Cool Records, which is the band's record label. "They're certainly appealing to the [jam] crowd," he told Billboard Magazine. "But they're also appealing to music fans in general. Our initial goal was to reach those fans of the Allman Brothers, Hendrix and Cream."

These days, the North Mississippi Allstars are doing their best to spread "roots music" to a wide range of audiences. "The music brings people together," said Luther. "No matter what style of music you play, if they can feel what you're playing, and you can play well, they appreciate it and get off on it."

Eugene residents over the age of 21 will have the opportunity to get off on the North Mississippi Allstars when they stop at the Wild Duck this Friday on their tour of alternative rock venues. Doors open at 8 p.m. and the show begins at 9 p.m. Tickets are \$12 in advance and \$14 at the door. The Wild Duck is located at 169 W. 6th Ave. Call 485-3825 for more information.



The North Mississippi Allstars will perform their alternative brand of classic Delta blues Friday at the Wild Duck Music Hall. The show begins at 9 p.m. and costs \$12.



Chrystal McConnell Emerald

(From left) Nick Hamilton stands stupefied because Tynan DeLong is in his "spot," a museum bench where he begins every day. Ignorant of his wrongdoing, DeLong searches for some fruit to offer his new friend in "Pieces," the Pocket Playhouse's final production of the season.

Pieces

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necessary element for the audience to accept what is happening.

The reason audiences may have trouble relating to the show is because it is very self-indulgent on the part of the directors and the actors. The choices the actors make have meaning to them that has been developed over the rehearsal process, but an audience that has never experienced the show before will not pick up on those meanings. There is no continuity in the combination of the pieces. The show requires an intellectual viewer willing to take the experience being presented and synthesize some individual meaning.

There are moments, however, when the self-indulgence brings something very real to the performance. Because the actors created most of what the audience sees and hears, they are able to openly display intimacy. In a monologue by Yuko Tokuda, the actress confesses her inability to smile. It isn't about being sad; it is about her face's physical characteristics while she is smiling. Her words really touched me. I

only hope that it will be one of the pieces in the shows performed.

Honestly, I don't know how to rate a show with seemingly endless plot lines. And with possible combinations numbering in the 20th exponent, nobody will ever see all the shows that could make up this play. The actors keep repeating things like, "We want you to understand us," and other attempts at connection and communication. But there really is no one message that is intended to be understood.

In any art that asks the viewer to be a part of the process, it is important that the viewers know what is expected of them. So all I can offer you as a potential viewer is this information: I would not expect that people without a comprehension and love of theater would be prepared to make the commitment necessary to benefit from seeing this show. But you may want to go just to see how you can make the pieces fit together.

"Pieces" runs today, Friday and Saturday at 5 p.m. in the Pocket Playhouse in Villard Hall. A \$1 donation is suggested.

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