

THE RETURN OF THE PRESSURE BOYS

Out of action for close to 20 years, a legendary local band reunites for a benefit show at Cats Cradle

BY KIRK ROSS



Cutline Text

The better part of two decades has passed since the last notes of the last Pressure Boys gig faded into the crowd at the April 1989 opening show of the Cats Cradle on Franklin Street.

For John Plymale, it was the end of an era. The band had effectively broken up already, but after playing the closing show at the old Cradle location the year before, they'd agreed to return to open the new location.

In the span since, the idea of a reunion has never been appealing. The feeling, Plymale said, was that the band "had run its course" and to just let it be a memory.

"So much of what gave us our kick was due to the irreverent nature of the band," he said. "Twenty years later, we're not quite the same people and it would be hard to be that as adults with children."

It was only after he and longtime friends Lane Wurster and Steve Balcom of The Splinter Group — a Carrboro-based design and marketing firm — were exploring how to follow-up last year's Songs for Sixty-Five Roses — a benefit record and series of concerts for the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation that the idea surfaced.

Plymale, whose young daughter Allie was diagnosed with CF in 2004 ("sixty-five roses" was her term for the disease), said Wurster and Balcom proposed a P-Boys gig as the best way to do something big.

For the first time, the idea seemed right, Plymale said, with a reunion coming in support of a cause rather than an attempt to recapture the past. Upon being contacted, the rest of the band jumped at the idea, and tickets for a May 2 show at Cats Cradle went on sale last week. If there's enough response, another one the following night may happen as well.

Like Plymale, Pressure Boys guitarist Bryon Settle was pretty well convinced the band would never take the stage again, although he admits he secretly wished it would happen.

Their parting wasn't due to acrimony among the members, Settle said, but after putting in roughly 100,000 miles on the road together, it was time to do something else. He agreed with Plymale that, at the time, there was a feeling that the band had had its run.

"That's exactly right," he said. "We'd all reached a point where we had other things we wanted to do."

The run started in 1981, when most members were still at Chapel Hill High School. Over the next 10 years, the band went through three bass players, three trumpet players and three vans. But the core — Settle, Plymale, saxophonist Greg Stafford and drummer Rob Ladd — remained constant. Together, they toured the country, playing almost 500 shows.



Cutline Text

PHOTO BY YORK WILSON

Once the decision was made to go ahead with the benefit, the band took a serious look at the songs and started pulling together a set list. Drawing on their love of Ska, the P-Boys were known for their tight rhythm section and punchy horns.

"We definitely talked about how we wouldn't want it to suck, and it was going to take a little work to make it not suck," Plymale said.

Settle has been going over his old guitar parts in his rehearsal studio, a converted barn behind his house in Hillsborough.

"That stuff is hard," he said.

Plymale, whose musical work for the last several years has been mostly as a producer at Durham's Overdub Lane, has been working on getting his singing chops in order.

Later this month, Ladd and bass player Jack Campbell are flying in from the West Coast for rehearsals. Stafford, now a lawyer in Pittsboro, and trumpeter Jay Widenhouse, who's been playing old-time jazz with the Firecracker Jazz Band in Asheville, will resume their roles in the horn section.

Tickets for the show are \$16 in advance and can be purchased on the Cats Cradle website at www.catscradle.com.

All proceeds will benefit the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. *



YOU'RE NEVER FAR FROM FLAVOR

VISIT CAROLINA BREWERY & GRILL IN PITTSBORO OR OUR ORIGINAL LOCATION ON CHAPEL HILL'S WEST END FOR LUNCH, DINNER, LATE NIGHT OR WEEKEND BRUNCH.

460 WEST FRANKLIN STREET DOWNTOWN CHAPEL HILL

BELLEMONT STATION (64/15-501) PITTSBORO

WWW.CAROLINABREWERY.COM