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May 7th, 2013

Shootin' the shit with Chatham County Line

Let it be known: This North Carolina group is "not your grandma's bluegrass band." On a recent afternoon in a Raleigh city park, they revealed their all-time favorite records, what life is like on the road (they're playin' in a travelin' band), and the truth about sharing a microphone.

Written by Jourdan Crouch Fairchild

Photographed by Duncan Wolfe

"Here's your headline: Chatham County Line has balls," joked guitarist Dave Wilson. He and his bandmates had found themselves on the tennis courts of a Raleigh, North Carolina city park on a recent spring day at the suggestion of the group's mandolin/fiddle player, John Teer. "Let's play some tennis!" he had said in an authentic Southern drawl. Nevermind that the guys were in their signature suits. In between shots, talk turned to last weekend's shenanigans. Greg Readling, the

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group's bassist, triumphed with his story of spending Easter brunch at home with the legendary Emmylou Harris and her band. After witnessing the banter for just a few minutes, it's obvious that this foursome really favors each other. Together since 1999, they've released five albums and traveled across the world for gigs. Here's what they shared about life in Carolina and the band they'd want to open for them (mum's the word).

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How did you come up with your name?

Dave Wilson: "When we first started practicing together, we'd do it at Chandler's house out in the country. It was one of those places where it was like the third white mailbox after the gravel road on the left. By the second or third time we got lost going there, we realized that each time we were crossing over into Chatham County. So we looked at each other, said "Chatham County Line!" and high fived."

What's the record or song that made you appreciate bluegrass music?

John Teer: "For me, it'd be Steve Earl and Del McCoury's "The Mountain." The organic nature of it and the raw power it possessed had a big impact on me. And of course Steve is such a great songwriter."

Chandler Holt: "Really early on I'd say "Old and in the Way," by that band Jerry Garcia played banjo in. I was kinda a dead head."

Wilson: "Just kind of?"

What's the song you wish you'd written:

Holt: "Umm...what's the song that's made the most money ever??"

Wilson: "The Gambler by Don Schlitz. The third verse of is amazing. It wraps it all up in a bow."

Which of your songs makes you happiest to play?

Teer: "I like "Let it Rock." It's just full of energy, and the crowd just gets really into it."

Holt: "That's a good, solid choice."

Wilson: "I like Route 23, the title track on our second record. It kind of brings me back to the time when we were finally taking this seriously. And so every time we play it I'm reminded of where we came from and where we are now."

What's the most unusual person you're inspired by?

Teer: "Alex "Hurricane" Higgins. He's a snooker player (it's a billiards game). He's deceased."

Wilson: "He's dead? Damn."



From left: John Teer, Dave Wilson, and Chandler Holt (not pictured, Greg Readling)

What's the bluegrass music stereotype you hate?

Teer: "The overalls, suspenders, the Heehaw formula."

Holt: "But I'd say that that shit is kinda dead now, especially for us. It's great that we, as a society and across the world, are more elevated now, so you don't get much of that."

When do you think that changed?

Wilson: "When all the people started dying off that had that preconceived notion. I think by the time our fourth album came out, they realized we're not your grandma's bluegrass band. The people coming to the shows had a lot more respect for us. They don't yell out Rocky Top and stuff anymore."

Holt: "People like Allison Krauss have taken this to a Carnegie Hall level. It's as true and artistic as anything else."

Teer: "The style we play and the category we fit in seems real popular now and that whole genre has been built up. I really saw the tide change once "O Brother, Where Art Thou" won a Grammy for album of the year, I think that's when things kind of became brighter."

What's the most embarrassing album you own?

Holt: "I kinda like The Beegees. It's not at all like what we do, and there's something just so good about that stuff."

Wilson: "I have "Private Eyes" by Hall and Oates. It's a terrible record. It's got like two good songs and everything else is just shit."

Teer: "Maybe Barney. That was in my acid days and I'd just put that on and get crazy naked in my house."

Wilson: "My acid days. Hey, we got a headline!"



Tell me the truth about sharing a microphone:

Wilson: "Chew gum, take a bath, and don't step on my feet."

Teer: "That sums it up. It's all about the breath. I quit smoking last fall, so that was a big help to everyone."

Holt: "Yeah, that was pretty huge for us. It was terrible."

Which musician or band would you love to have open for you?

Wilson: "Mumford and Sons."

Teer: "Yeah, that'd be perfect."

Wilson: "Thanks for warming up the stage boys..."

Holt: "...now get the fuck outta here."

Why do you guys stay in the Research Triangle?

Holt: "Have you been around this place? It's the center of the world these days. There's a killer music scene. You have three major universities, three very cool towns within 30 minutes of each other, all kinds of great art and artists, restaurants...really anything you want."

Wilson: "There are a bunch of great bands here: Megafaun, Lost in the Trees, Birds and Arrows, Mandolin Orange."

What's better: East or West Carolina barbeque?

Holt: "I go east because you can have more side items with typical eastern bbq. West is just fries and hushpuppies. East you can get baked beans, mac and cheese."

Teer: "I have to say West cause I'm from there."

Wilson: "I think we're split down the middle."

What's the one thing you need on tour?

Teer: "Hair product."

Wilson: "Oh yeah, he's a connoisseur."

Holt: "Food. We always need to find a local place that serves killer food."

What's the first car you took on the road between gigs?

Wilson: "I had a Honda accord station wagon, so we built this coffin that would go on the roof for the stand up bass."

Holt: "It said Chatham County Line in a Western font down the side."

Where is it now?

Wilson: "Sitting in my backyard."

What were you doing at 10am today?

Teer: "I was asleep."

Wilson: "I was on my second cup of coffee."

Holt: "I was actually writing a song. I usually can't say that."

Wilson: "Well Chandler gets a gold star!"

Holt: "Yep, I was in my office. I was working and they were all flailing about."

How would you describe your fans?

Wilson: "They used to be 60-90 years old, but after the third record, they got a lot younger. We've been around so long that people's younger siblings are coming out and saying, 'My older brother loved you guys when he was at UNC.'"

Holt: "And their kids man. They're like, 'Our parents told us to come see this show.' That's kind of the best thing. The youngsters tell their friends, but the old folks still buy the cds."

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