

## Arrogance Reigns Supreme

The original Chapel Hill band is still cranking after all these years.

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**Old-School Arrogance**

The reign of Arrogance. Sounds like something straight out of a European history book, doesn't it? The run of a particularly overbearing ruler perhaps. However, in terms of North Carolina music, it refers to most of the '70s and into the early '80s, the time period in which the band Arrogance released five records and took command of many an area rock club. Guitarist Robert Kirkland and bassist Don Dixon, who traded off on lead vocals

in addition to being the band's chief songwriters, represent the only constants in Arrogance's existence. The pair first crossed paths at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, a meeting that Kirkland remembers both fondly and vividly. "First day of freshman year, fall '69, at Aycock dorm Room 301 on the UNC campus. My roommate Mike Greer and I were setting up our guitar amps in the dorm room so that we could run a turntable directly into them for stereo. We were forcing our own musical tastes on the rest of the world through that open window. Stuff like Procol Harum, King Crimson, Free, Spooky Tooth--anything English," is how Kirkland sets the scene. "That day I met Dixon, and the three of us sort of sat around and played some stuff. I was impressed by the fact that Don was so uninhibited and had a great voice."

Kirkland, Greer, Dixon, and Jimmy Glasgow, their commuter drummer from East Carolina University, soon began playing as The Dog Breath Blues Band, leaning heavily on an eclectic mix of sources. "I was at their very first gig at The Asparagus Farm in Chapel Hill," shares Jim Spainhour, an early supporter of the band and a guy who let Dixon and Kirkland crash in his frat house for months. "They played an interesting mix of music from The Beatles, Black Sabbath, Muddy Waters. They did his (Waters') version of The Stone's 'Let's Spend the Night Together.'" Dixon also recalls the tunes from that night--"She's So Heavy," almost everything from the then import-only first Sabbath record, songs from Mountain and Cream--as well as the trimmings: "(The Asparagus Farm) had a light show and they were running the original King Kong across our faces."

Before the band released their first recording in 1972, they changed their name to Arrogance. "Then everybody's hair got long, and the rest is a blur," says Kirkland, probably only 75 percent kidding. That initial release, Give Us a Break, and the rest of the Arrogance catalog--Prolepsis, Rumors, Suddenly and the live document Lively--were reissued on CD in 2000. Due to inexplicable record-industry disinterest in the early '80s, the collection of songs that captured Arrogance at the top of their game remained unreleased until recently. That album, 5'11", (put out by heroic Charlotte-based label Gaff Music) consists of a dozen songs recorded in '82 for what would have been the band's swan song had any label recognized the collection's worthiness, as well as 10 other tunes from the vaults. It's a stunning mix of new wave-flavored rock and bouncy, soulful pop, including seven songs that ended up being rerecorded for Dixon's superb

1985 debut *Most of the Girls Like to Dance but Only Some of the Boys Do*--most notably "Praying Mantis," which Dixon calls "my own private 'Louie Louie'" in the entertaining liner notes. "All six records are now accessible, when before, they weren't," Kirkland comments, tongue again at least halfway in cheek. "Like a folk tale that was passed down through word of mouth. Now you can hold it. There goes the mystique." Time spent with those half-dozen albums reveals a band going through many stages, and almost as many line-up shifts. "Musically they were an amalgam of '70s-era acoustic singer/songwriters and '60s-era rock 'n' roll," says Raleigh's Dave Teal, a student at UNC from 1974-'78 and now a software tester at SAS. "What made them such a great live band, however, was a strong dose of R&B."

There they are, the words you always hear when someone talks about Arrogance: a great live band. Having not moved to North Carolina until 1988, I missed their reign and have never seen the band perform. The good news is that I now have a chance because Dixon, Kirkland, ace guitarist Rod Abernethy, keyboardist Marty Stout, and drummer Scott Davison--the lineup for Arrogance's last three recordings--have taken to playing out again, with a stop at Raleigh's Lincoln Theatre on Nov. 29. (Reuniting to open the show is the band that turned out to be my Arrogance, The Woods.) I've been cramming for the show by listening to the albums, which are solid and engaging. But again, as people are so fond of announcing, you really needed to see Arrogance live. Teal caught a number of their shows during his UNC stint. "During the mid to late '70s in Chapel Hill, going to see Arrogance was practically a rite of passage," he offers. "When they played live they rocked hard and steady ... and loud."

"Hot stage, lots o' sweat, women would actually flash you when their date wasn't looking," is how Kirkland describes a typical mid-'70s show. "We were enjoying big crowds at that time and it was quite thrilling to be the center of attention. Onstage we still kept it interesting because we never wore anything out by rehearsing it to death."

"In the late '70s, when we were on Warner Brothers, we were cranking," adds Dixon. "I was likely to climb up on my amp and scream 'til I passed out." OK, so how different will the show at the Lincoln Theatre be, I ask Dixon. "I will not be climbing on anything."