

Music Is Life for Gainesville's 'Mudcrutch'

By JOHN BARTOSEK
Of the Sun Staff

Tom Petty has a one-track mind. It's on music. Bass guitarist for "Mudcrutch," that seemingly eternal Gainesville rock and roll band, Tom talks about everything. But somehow it all gets back to music.

"It's our life," he says quietly.

"Our," includes lead guitarist Mike Campbell, guitarist Danny Roberts, Ben Mont Tench on piano and drummer Randall Marsh. And music is their life.

"Mudcrutch" returned last week from a six-week tour in Atlanta and Macon, Ga., and a short but well-received statewide tour. A recent weekend in Gainesville included two shows at The Keg, a small club on Southwest 16 Avenue.

Friday night doesn't really end until sunrise Saturday; so Saturday begins at 2 p.m.

IN A STANDARD two-bedroom apartment on the northwest edge of the city, Tom slouches in a leather chair, eyes and mouth both half-closed. He's still waking up, with the help of an occasional cup of coffee and a cigaret. His eyes never open all the way but they do get clearer as the day goes on.

Mike Campbell, dark hair, dark shirt, dark jeans, dark boots, light face and incredibly quick fingers, lies on the dull olive couch and picks an acoustic guitar...or an electric one...or a bass...anything. Mike is the quiet serious one, on and off stage.

Dan wanders out of the shower, dark brown hair still tangled and dripping on his chest. He sits down for about five minutes and wanders off again.

He's mobile; you never see him more than ten minutes at a time until he climbs on stage. Oddly enough, he's also six inches taller than he looks from the audience.

Joining the band only about two months ago, Ben was at school in New Orleans before adding his piano to the group. He first played with "Mudcrutch" a year ago, and played with them on and off since then. Ben's father is Circuit Court Judge Benjamin M. Tench of Gainesville.

Later in the afternoon, Randall walks in with a wisecrack and a smile. He's from Bushnell, Fla., and proud of it.

"Just a good old country boy," Tom agrees.

Randall is nearly a misfit; his dark hair barely covers his ears, he's shorter than he seems on stage, he insists on fresh vegetables with his meals and he can be serious, though he obviously prefers not to.

Sound man Keith 'Duke' McAllister also ranks as a band



FROM LEFT, TOM PETTY, BASS, BEN MONT TENCH, PIANO, RANDALL MARSH, DRUMS, DAN ROBERTS, GUITAR, MIKE CAMPBELL, LEAD GUITAR

member. Only 20 years old, not really long blonde hair, friendly and very trusting face, he doesn't claim any special electronic knowledge.

"Just have to learn where to plug in what," he says.

He wants to explain everything though, and it sounds like he knows more than plugs. Duke reads classified ads, scrounging for equipment and still another place to rent. (Nine dogs and eight cats, and he's just been evicted again.)

AS A GROUP, Mudcrutch is bashful, almost withdrawn about themselves, but still excited about publicity. Especially Tom.

"That'll be cool, being in a Gainesville newspaper," he says. Tom is from Gainesville, a graduate of GHS. "High school was the most bitter experience of my life," he says quietly. Apparently rules about long hair were strict then.

But Tom, now 22, was playing bass guitar at 14 and was in his first band in eighth grade. He's even got a snapshot of it somewhere in the group scrapbook.

He's there in a coat and you can see his ears and neck and he looks awake. The drum in the background has "Sundowners" written on it.

Randall also started young, in a group called the "Bushnell Grasshoppers." Really. Then he met Mike and the pair, both 23, were playing rock when they ran across Tom, who was still doing country-western.

"They turned me on to playing rock," Tom says. That was over two and a half years ago.

Besides a bass, Tom brought the name "Mudcrutch" with him. The Mudcrutch origins are nebulous but seem to be mostly a

reaction to "dumb group names" like "Sundowners" and "Grasshoppers." The band is now changing names to "Bullseye."

DAN JOINED about three months ago after a stint with "Power," another band familiar in this area. Since he's out of the room (again), Dan's age is up for debate. Guesses range from 19 to 25 ("Well, he's seen some bad times.") and the consensus is 20. He plays guitar and sings with — and without — Tom.

Talk runs to past shows...

January behind the Hub. So cold. "We were all drunk. We were drinking whiskey to keep warm." The old joke about carrying a flask in case of snakebite and keeping a rattlesnake too.

Halloween in the Plaza. Strange tales told by all. Tom has snapshots again. A few good imitations of Bruce Nearon, of "Ye

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Continued Story

Mudcrutch Songs: Lots of Hope

Pirates' Crew, a group which has produced several UF concerts.

The Rat in days gone by. All the lights go out. "Mudcrutch" comes on, faces and hands painted green to glow in the dark. When the lights come on, the paint disappears.

Mudcrutch Farm, the super old days. "After Church On Sunday," the posters read. About 2 years ago, the group lived together by a lake at the far end of NW 45 Avenue. Free concerts, good times for all.

Dinner at 4:30 p.m. is a major conflict. Randall insists on his own vegetables, everybody else insists on cheap. Somebody digs out the yellow pages and calls out names for a vote. It takes 20 minutes to decide.

DAN TAKES OFF again after dinner, saying he'll be back in a little while. But nobody believes him.

Randall stretches out on the couch, very quiet and still, and listens to country-western-rock albums. He's calm, but it looks like an effort. Mike thumbs various guitars. Duke runs out to check on another classified ad and plug in at The Keg.

The phone rings occasionally on appearances during the Florida tour. Top billing at one club is gratefully accepted; a "battle of the

bands" is gracefully declined. Dan returns to sing through several harmonies on acoustic guitars.

And it's suddenly 9:20 p.m. They call ahead to say they're on their way. The tape recorder and song list are forgotten, though the departure is calm and leisurely. Whoever's driving runs a red light on the way, and Randall stops for a 40-cent piece of fried chicken.

The pace speeds up to almost a hurry at The Keg. Duke is hooking up the last of his microphones; Dan rearranges an amplifier. Mike tunes up, while Randall fills the beer pitchers. Tom greets an old friend, another fellow he played with at some time. And then they're finally playing.

THE FIRST SET is short, about 40 minutes. It's not really choppy but it seems forced. Probably takes a while to loosen up.

The high point is one of Dan's songs, "Keep on Singing." Pitchers are refilled at an average of one every five minutes. Friends of the band drop by the table quite regularly. Nice to have free beer written into the contract.

Tom asks how the set was and everyone agrees it was worth drinking to. So they do. Except Duke. He's not quite satisfied. He

rearranges a few microphones and hopes somebody comes back with the tape recorder soon.

The second set is a bit longer and a lot tighter.

Mike and Dan are freer now, jamming throughout the songs. Randall rocks away in his own world and doesn't bother to look up. Duke relaxes and makes the rounds of the tables, saying hi.

DURING THE BREAK, Mudcrutch and Friends wander outside and around to the back for some fresh air and a little conversation. Somebody becomes friends with a stray cat.

They march inside in a column, which looks a tad suspicious. Friends rejoin their tables and beer; Mudcrutch nearly leaps on stage, which looks even more suspicious.

But it doesn't matter. Nothing matters, really, except that you're sailing away with this music and it's so incredibly good now. Country rock, if there is such a thing. Cooking. Rocking. It feels good, however you describe it.

They do some old rock and roll numbers: Not Fade Away, Walking the Dog, Johnny B. Goode.

SOME OF THE WORDS start to sink in:

"I'm still sittin' here playing guitar
Waiting for that lucky break"

"Hopin' something comes my way"

"Can't help wonderin' if I'll ever get off the ground"

"It's too much for a young boy
To figure out all alone"

There's lots of hope in the songs. A lot of waiting. If you look, you can find some sadness too.

It seems a long time while they're playing, but the break comes too soon. Fewer people trek out back this time. Both the band and the beer are flowing nicely now. The tape recorder finally arrives.

For the last set, the audience has dwindled to about 25. But nobody seems to mind. Just keep filling those pitchers. Duke gets most of the set on tape.

THAT PARTY FEELING goes on after the music stops. Randall and Dan are pushing for a trip to New Orleans. Mike and Tom don't look like they'd mind. They're finally out of the club, sprawled back in the van and back at the apartment.

Everybody is up and ready at the apartment, and the trip to New Orleans is finalized. If you're not awake until 2:30 p.m., you've still got a whole night in front of you at 2:30 a.m.