



# WHERE Mingo MEETS Fishtrap



BY CINDY ROYAL

**I**n North Texas, just east of Denton, Mingo Road meets Fishtrap Road at an intersection with a farm, a junkyard and a beauty salon. It is here that Roger Blevins found a new tire, a slice of Americana and the inspiration to name his band.

"I had a blowout and needed to replace the tire and remove the spare," said Blevins, leader and guitarist of the Denton-based group, Mingo Fishtrap. "The directions I got said this junkyard was on Mingo-Fishtrap Road, so I drove around on this doughnut of a tire all through the country, trying to find the place. I finally came upon this intersection and thought 'what an unusual combination of establishments out here in the middle of nowhere.' The name stuck with me and that's what I decided to call the band."

A nine-member ensemble with a horn section, keyboardist and Latin percussionist is certainly an unusual combination in a music scene known for the standard guitar/bass/drums format. Mingo Fishtrap's sound is schizophrenically described by fans and critics as soul, jazz, funk, blues and rock, among other things. CONTINUED ON

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# Mingo Fishtrap

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 47 “Our sound is hard to categorize. I would describe it as deep-fried soul with '60s and '70s funk influences and a New Orleans twist,” Blevins said. The Louisiana flair comes from Blevins’ father, Roger Sr., who spent time playing bass in bands around Baton Rouge and New Orleans and who has been a member of the current lineup of Mingo Fishtrap for seven months.

The original lineup met in 1992 as students at the University of North Texas College of Music. Blevins, himself an anachronism, a 26-year-old sporting a '20s-style newsboy cap, long sideburns and just a smudge of a goatee on his chin, speaks insightfully regarding the value of his education.

“The great thing about that kind of education is that it gives you a common language. It makes it easier to communicate with one another. It also gives you a larger palette of options in terms of the colors you can use effectively,” Blevins said. “But, it can’t teach you how to write a good song that people want to hear. What it can do is teach you how to make a good song better.”

The college provides Denton with a steady

stream of talent giving the city the reputation as a music hotbed, launching the likes of Tripping Daisy, Brave Combo and Deep Blue Something. This abundance of musicianship makes for a competitive environment.

“It’s a small town with thousands of musicians and artists. There are great bands in every genre. If you suck, they know. If you miss a note, they know. If you look the least bit uncomfortable on stage, throw some salt on yourself, you’re about to be eaten,” Blevins said. “But it is a great place to go through basic training.”

The proof of that training is evident in a Mingo Fishtrap live performance. A typical show is an energetic romp. Throughout, the horn section pulls off slick choreography and mimics lyrics, at times jumping off stage and traipsing through the crowd like an impromptu Mardi Gras parade. Covers of the Cajun classic, “Jambalaya (On the Bayou)” and the '70s hit, “Pick Up the Pieces” from the Average White Band get the crowd moving, but it’s the group’s original pieces that reflect their tightness and ability to execute smooth transitions between genres. Blevins delivers vocals ranging from smooth Texas blues through a rapid-fire hip-hop delivery on “People Person.” Throwing in some DJ vocal scratching and rap licks that would make Will Smith proud, Blevins provides the

hub around which this ragtag crew revolves.

A full dance floor and an audience ready to soak up the energy emanating from the stage complete the experience. “The best performances for us are the ones where we have an audience that understands where we are coming from. The ones that can relate to our influences and really get into the show,” Blevins said.

References to the dream sequence in the musical *Oklahoma* and a Maceo Parker number paying homage to everyone from Otis Redding and Wilson Pickett to Cameo and Lauryn Hill make the show a mirthful overview of music history.

“I think a sense of historical relevance is important in music,” Blevins said. “We do the Maceo Parker tune to show respect to our influences — pretty blatantly!”

Those diverse influences are due in part to the timing of Blevins’ musical upbringing. Blevins thinks nostalgically back to his childhood in the early '70s when radio was less format-driven.

“The first song I remember hearing on the radio was ‘Sir Duke’ by Stevie Wonder. Then I think they played some Billy Joel. That would never happen today. There is a very separatist attitude in music today race-wise, but age and gender, too.” CONTINUED ON PAGE 56

# Mingo Fishtrap

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 50 Mingo Fishtrap has opened for big audience draws like the Neville Brothers, the Dirty Dozen, and Blood, Sweat, and Tears, but now faces the challenge of headlining some of the same venues.

"Sometimes your first time playing a venue is 5,000 people or more, and you're opening for a big name. The next time you're headlining and there are all of 100 people in the room. It can feel like one step forward, two steps back, but the thing you have to keep in mind is, like in any business, you have to build a clientele," Blevins said.

Blevins is the band's chief songwriter but admits that the whole band contributes something unique to the finished product. "The collaboration process is great, but it's crazy. I bring a song to the group and everyone fleshes it out. Eventually, it is totally different than my original version."

The band often gets together to rehearse at Blevins' house, but he confesses that it is not always the most productive environment. "We seem to get more accomplished when there is no Sega or easily accessible alcohol lying around!"

Plans for the band in the immediate future include relocation to Austin. Blevins feels that

moving to the Live Music Capital is a good business decision. "Austin is a very music-friendly city with accessibility to good studios and venues that cater to bands rather than canned music. Most of the contacts we have made operate out of Austin," said Blevins, who also admits to some personal reasons for the move. "I can drive out to the Hill Country and that's really cool. Austin's got a very cool vibe which lends itself to creativity."

Mingo Fishtrap has one released CD, *Succotash*, which can be purchased on their Web site, [www.mingofishtrap.com](http://www.mingofishtrap.com), but they have several new songs that have already made their way into the live show. "We have enough material for a new CD, so now we are weighing our options," Blevins said.

Blevins and the members of his band work hard to preserve the integrity of their music. "I won't let someone tell me which songs we can and can't play. They'll end up having a certain sound because we have a certain sound, not because we have a hit song formula and 20 racks full of samplers," said Blevins, who jokes about the ramifications of such a staunch position.

"I guess that kind of attitude won't put us next in line to open for the Backstreet Boys, which is a real shame, because I hear they have really good deli trays." X

# Lyle Lovett

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31 Things have obviously changed quite a bit for Lyle. He's a big star and makes big records. He sells out concert halls all over the world, and can afford a closet of Armani suits. He has become arguably the state's biggest entertainer, a status bordering that of an icon. And he's part of an ever changing perception of musicians in Texas. Along with the ever growing popularity of Austin as a hotbed of musical talent, Lyle has helped to encourage a depth and growth of musical community in the state, especially in a town like Austin. "That city has been such a center for performers and it's been such a great artistic community, and being the beautiful place that it is, I played there as much as anywhere coming up. It's a place in Texas where it's a legitimate thing to be a singer-songwriter. People don't treat you weird if you say you're a singer. I think that's vitally important to a musician."

As so it makes perfect sense that Lyle will welcome the year 2000 in the one place that is continually raising the flag of Texas music. He will be in Austin, alongside his buddy Robert Earl Keen, Shawn Colvin and Kelly Willis for a free outdoor show on Congress Avenue. What better way to say goodbye to the century than to have a Lyle Lovett song bid it *adieu*. He is working on putting together his Large Band for the performance, something he feels is more appropriate than him simply strolling the stage with guitar. "It's a big celebration you know. I don't want to be a disappointment. I don't want people to come and expect big streamers and balloons and then have to listen to me go up there and play folk music."

The truth is, Lyle could go up on stage and stand there for two hours and the crowd would leave happy. But true to his nature as a singer and performer, he wants to give his audience their money's worth, even if he still feels sometimes like he's just trying to make it in the music business.

"I still feel like I'm just startin' out and tryin' to get my stuff out there," he adds. "You know, when you make things up for a living it can be a pretty insecure lifestyle." X

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Chris Berend, a native Texan, is an entertainment editor at Esquire Magazine in New York. He is a music fanatic, with over 20 nationally published articles on musicians, actors, and magicians to his credit.

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