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## VISITING ACT | Finger Pickin' Good

Southern Culture on the Skids isn't just about fried chicken

BY SHAWNTÉ SALABERT



*Tarheel rockers (L to R): S.C.O.T.S. are Rick Miller, Mary Huff, and Dave Hartman*

**Southern Culture on the Skids** w/ Jule Brown Fri. Dec. 8 10 p.m. \$15 Music Farm 32 Ann St. 853-3276 [www.musicfarm.com](http://www.musicfarm.com) [www.scots.com](http://www.scots.com)

Rick Miller has a point, the kind that makes you lean back a little in your chair, stroke the thinkin' spot underneath your chin and release a little, "Ahhhhh..."

See, ole Rick and his band — bassist Mary Huff, stand-up drummer Dave Hartman — have been putting up with the occasional shit-talkin' for years. Well, really, for about 20 years. Their genre-bending, countrified rock 'n' roll

outfit Southern Culture on the Skids is to Southern storytelling what Tenacious D is to heavy metal histrionics. That's to say, they're heavy on the camp and sneaky with the intellect — a subversively sophisticated mix that often leaves a few holier-than-thous in the dust.

Flinging fried chicken into the audience and spouting lyrics advocating the heavy use of hair spray and whiskey is just a cover, folks. Brewing down below is an almost nerdy devotion to country music lineage and a respect for songwriting that just so happens to enjoy dressin' up in redneck finery.

"Mary's very striking in her bouffant wig and the image that we've used, a lot of people just can't get past that," says Miller. "If we're just a novelty band, how come we've lasted so long?"

Since 1985, to be exact. Told ya homeboy had a point. Simple, but solid.

Carolina-bred to the core, SCOTS have an unwavering love for the South — the good, the bad, and the kitschy. To transform an appreciation for both the finer points of country music and the skewering of stereotypes into something that is at once entertaining and well thought out is a skill, and Miller takes their detractors with a grain of salt.

"I find that a lot of people in these alt-country bands, they've taken themselves very seriously — almost to the point of thinking they're national treasures or something," he says. "The problem with some of that stuff is, to me, you can be serious about your music, but don't be boring about it."

No threat of snoozin' with this band. Their most recent release, *Double Wide and Live*, only the second live album for the notoriously tour-happy group, is a celebration of the "frenzied and crazy" energy felt at SCOTS' shows.

"I think part of what we do is to entertain people," says Miller. "In that sense, I think we're much closer to the country artists of the past. I think that our live thing has always been our meat and potatoes, our bread and butter; [people] are entertained, people laugh and they have a good time. They go home and feel that they've enjoyed themselves at one of our shows. That's important to us."

A career on the road certainly doesn't pale in comparison to the potential drudgery of cubicle life, but two decades is still an incredibly long time in this world of shiny objects to focus on any one thing. Enter SCOTS' upcoming covers album, a first-time project drummed up by a band far too excited about what they do to let it become stale.

Slated for release in early 2007, *Countryopolitan Favorites* is promised as a record full of rearranged country and rock 'n' roll, served up with a side order of sass and a thick coating of SCOTS.

"It actually was as much work as doing an original album," Miller laughs. "Why didn't we just write some songs if we were going to put this much work into it!"

This doesn't sound like trailer park shtick, it doesn't sound like backwoods schlock; instead, it sounds surprisingly like a band not content to rest upon their laurels (and their image) but driven instead to constantly seek a fresh buzz.

"We did stuff like T. Rex, but we'd sing it like George [Jones] and Tammy [Wynette]," Miller explains. "We did a Roger Miller song, but kind of like if Roger Miller played surf guitar — that's what it would sound like."

The new album's title is a reference to a style of music that influenced Miller (Rick, that is) in his younger years, an homage to what he calls "a conscious attempt to bend the genre a bit, change what people thought country music was." A fitting reflection, it seems, for a guy whose band, although they've relied heavily on parody to swell the audience, is willing to bust down some doors and some misconceptions, twist around the idea of Southern music and mold it like a Technicolor lump of clay.