

BY MARCUS AMAKER

The hard work and determination required for a local band in search of a major record deal can either destroy a solid foundation or make that foundation stronger. The latter is definitely true for Columbia's own Robins Cradle.

On the strength of their first CD, the critically acclaimed *Stone Flutedge*, the band had been making waves in West Columbia where enthusiastic crowds continually pack their live performances. Now, founding members Lance Williams and Robin Brooks are ready to bring their music to other areas around the city, particularly Five Points and the USC campus.

Robins Cradle formed three years ago when Lance and Robin were members of separate local bands. As a member of Rear Window, Lance attended a show for some of his fellow band members who were playing in a side project of Hootie and the Blowfish guitarist Mark Bryan. At that time, Robin was in the acoustic group She Says. The two first encountered when She Says was the opening act for Bryan's group, called Mark Brian and the Sensational Wingnuts. Lance was struck with Robin's talent.

"I was watching She Says perform and her voice stood out," he said.

With the help of coincidence (and some would say fate), Lance was able to contact Robin through a mutual friend. And as they say, the rest was history. A year after they first met, the two began to combine her lyrics with his guitar chords to form the songs that would later appear on *Stone Flutedge*.

In a relatively quick fashion, they were able to record a six song demo tape entitled *Lately*. After that tape's release, the underground press began to catch on. Critics applauded the power behind Brooks' vocals and marveled her use of the flute in many of the band's songs. Robins Cradle were also helped by a "battle of the bands" competition in Savannah, GA, in which they were awarded Best Vocals, and voted Runner-Up in a judging of 60 tapes. It soon became apparent that the group was a unique outfit -- their sound was easily distinguishable when compared to the no-thrills rock offered by other bands in the area.

Things weren't always as smooth as they could have been, however. In the early days of the band's history, they suffered from a minor reluctance on stage.

"We were told that our songs were good, but our stage presence wasn't there," explains Williams. "Since then we have learned how to perfect our stage performance. We try not to separate ourselves from our audience."

Since that time, Robins Cradle has evolved into a more confident act because of newer, stronger material. Comparing the early stuff on *Lately* to the new revamped versions on *Stone Flutedge* is a testament to the band's artistic growth.

"Someone explained it well when they said that *Lately* is like a little brother to *Stone Flutedge*. This CD has evolved from playing live," adds Williams. "We believe in our songs more this time around."

That progression can be heard when listening to the self-produced *Stone Flutedge*. In 11 songs, Robins Cradle tell stories of anger, betrayal and love. Songs like "If U Ever Will" and "But I Don't Have U" work their way into the listener's head and never lets go. Honest lyrics (we're sitting in the same room yet it seems I'm all alone/ it's hard for me to feel your love when your heart is made of stone) and groove-driven melodies fuel every song on the disc. Brooks' strong belief is that, as she put it, "singing is an instrument itself," carries over into songs like "Cry As I Might" and "Dangerous Game." Still, others like "Crazy" are all out rock songs, and "Write Me A Letter" and "Lately" are beautiful ballads.

It's impossible to describe a Robins Cradle song without mentioning the flute. It has become a trademark of their music and a staple of their high energy shows.

Numerous changes in the band's lineup have plagued them since beginning, but that should all change with the addition of Charlie Rabon on bass and James Alescio on drums.

Robins Cradle are looking for 1997 to be their year. With an ever-increasing fan base, nothing should stop them from becoming a major force in South Carolina's music scene.★



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STONE

FLUTEDGE

robins cradle look to break into usc's music scene