

Local 'grassers Hit and Run make good

By GARIAN VIGIL
For the Colorado Daily

Once "O Brother Where Art Thou" pushed mountain music into the mainstream, an abundance of bluegrass-infused bands sprang from the woodwork. In a genre that claims influences as varied as the Stanley Brothers, Jerry Garcia and the Dixie Chicks, it can be difficult to determine just what kind of 'grass you might be in for on any particular night.

Hit and Run Bluegrass is arguably the fastest-rising new local act, winning both the Rockygrass 2002 and Telluride Bluegrass 2003 festival band contests — an unprecedented feat, according to Annabel Lukins, director of marketing for festival producers Planet Bluegrass.

"For a band to meet and then exceed [our] expectations by winning over our judges at two of our festivals back-to-back for the first time in our history is a sure sign of great talent," said Lukins.

Just don't call them a jam band.

"We call ourselves a contemporary bluegrass band," explained Rebecca Hoggan, guitarist and vocalist for Hit and Run. "People often confuse that with newgrass or jamgrass."

While the distinction may be lost on the uninitiated, the band sees a difference. "It took discipline to try to limit our influences. We're fans of jamgrass, but we aren't that band. We are song- and arrangement-oriented. We strive for a very polished sound."

The members of Hit and Run met at different bluegrass festivals around the state of Colorado, coming together officially as a band in fall 2001. They were attracted to the idea of creating a band made up of



Hit and Run open the RockyGrass Festival with a set from 11 a.m. to noon on Friday.

younger musicians.

"I grew up with a banjo-pickin' daddy," said upright bassist and vocalist Erin Coats. "My father and his friends were all in their 40s when I played with them. It's so refreshing to be in a band with people my age."

Not only do band members relate on a generational level, they share a common lifestyle that lends itself to the band's success.

"We wanted to be in a band with people who didn't have different sorts of obligations, like careers or family," said Hoggan. "That means we have the potential to go out on the road."

And the road calls out. Hit and Run is currently on a band savings plan, hoping to collect enough money to purchase a vehicle to travel the western U.S. festival circuit.

Hit and Run also intends to record a CD for release in spring 2004. "We hope a major

bluegrass label will be interested," said Hoggan. "But if not, we will release it on our own."

It is that kind of determination that drives the band. Members emphasize that they are never willing to rest on their laurels, focusing instead on musical growth and building momentum for the future.

"The people in this band are so committed and willing to do so much. It's so inspiring," said John Frazier, mandolin player and vocalist.

While the band continues to work for new achievements, winning the Telluride contest has been key to their vision.

"It's the crown jewel of festivals," said Todd Livingston, Rockygrass 2001 Dobro champion and band member. "It was a big goal that I can cross off my list."

"It's very exciting; we're thrilled," Frazier added. "We definitely worked hard for that contest. We feel lucky and blessed."

Winning these contests justifies the intense focus on music and long hours of practice, Livingston said, in a culture that views music as a hobby rather

than a bona fide profession. "It really gives me personal support for what I do."

As band members look forward to this weekend's sold-out Rockygrass Festival, they are relieved to be free of the pressure of competing in a contest. As last year's winning band, Hit and Run will kick it all off with a performance at 11 a.m. today.

"Opening up is exciting because we get to try to set the vibe for the whole fest," said banjo player Aaron Youngberg.

Added Coats, "Telluride was very un-festival-like for us. We were working so hard — going to bed early, getting up early. [At Rockygrass] we play very first, then we get to relax and pick with our friends for the rest of the festival."

No Rockygrass tickets? Never fear. Hit and Run headline the Fox on Thursday, July 31st, supported by The Wayfarers and High on the Hog, both Telluride second-place winners.

"We get to play with our best friends," said Hoggan, "It's our own mini-festival."