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E-flat duo to hit right key at Royal

By Richard Carter/For the Times Record News
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The E-flat note is a bit livelier than you might think.

Take traditional music group the E-Flat Porch Band. The McKinney, Texas, duo has been playing their own eclectic brand of swinging folk, blues, jazz and country music for years now - what they like to call "front-porch" music.

It's a sound powered by the band's bedrock - their infamous "bass drum," which is an old wooden soda crate tuned to the "front-porch" key of E-flat.

It's a sound the ever-eclectic and always angst-free E-Flat Porch Band will bring to Archer City's Royal Theater Aug. 21. Local singer songwriter Johnny Cooper opens the show as the Late Week Lazy Boy Supper Club begins its fall 2004 season.

The musical duo of Duane Brown, who sings and plays guitar and harp, and Rudy Littrell, who plays doghouse bass, harp, wooden crate and percussion, found their sound and name on Brown's front porch years ago.

They were just peaceably jamming away and minding their own business.

"One day I noticed that whenever I hit an E-flat," Littrell said, "well, the porch would just buzz. It was just real resonant at E-flat. Hence, we thought it must be an E-flat porch."

To duplicate the sound of his foot tapping on that porch, Littrell shored up an old soda pop crate and put a microphone in it. "I thought 'Whoo, this is not bad.' You just tap it with your foot and it has a real nice bump to it. It sounds like a porch floor to me."

Two CDs later, with a third on the way, the two musicians have built a solid reputation in the region performing front porch tunes at festivals, clubs, special events and schools.

The 50-something musicians are also members of the Touring Artist Roster of the Texas Commission on the Arts and provide educational programs to teach young and old music lovers about traditional American music.

If the two band members, sometimes joined by a mandolin player, take their playing and music seriously, they also realize the best music is not only serious. They bill themselves as a "no-angst band" and humorously distribute a no-angst patch to their audiences.

"It helps to fend off those angst-full singer-songwriters," Littrell said. "There's only so much of that 'Woe is me, poor pitiful me' I can take. After about 10 seconds, I have to go get a beverage."

Both members came to their playing through different paths. Brown is primarily a self-taught guitarist who picked up the harp. Littrell had percussion lessons as a child and was a music major at the University of North Texas until he got burned out on the overly technical chops.

Their main musical interest is old blues and folk blues, namely the old Delta blues, Littrell said. While he grew up with pop, rock and jazz, Brown introduced him to the blues.

"That was more to my flavor. It's real gritty and down to earth and we both like that," Littrell said.

While both men have other jobs, their first priority is music. "We would love for our ship to come in. We'd love it if we could get booked at more good things."

Littrell does fondly remember getting to play last year with Pete Seeger and hang out later with the folk legend at a Woodie Guthrie festival in Pampa, Texas. "That was my one night with a great person."