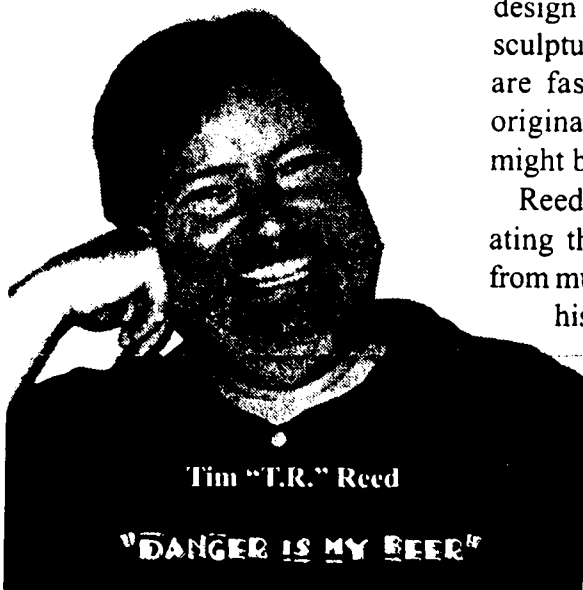


WHIRLIGIG MAN

by Sasha Reynolds-Neu



Tim "T.R." Reed

"DANGER IS MY BEER"

Round and round they go; zany and vividly colorful creations with names such as *Viagatron* (don't ask), *Salad Shooter* (a guy in a rotating salad bowl shooting lively looking vegetables), *Right Touch of Menthol*, *Tennis Bugs*, *Electric Bathtub* and many, many more. They're Whirligigs—or Creachter Sculptures—and their creator is the equally zany Tuskaloosan, Tim "T.R." Reed.

A regular at the Kentuck Festival of the Arts since 1986, Tim admits to feeling fortunate that he's been able to work full time at his art for more than a dozen years. But one close look at his creations and it's easy to figure out why they're so popular. Tim is a master artist and a stickler for detail, not to mention a nut.

From the attention given to color choices, paint designs, character carvings and the myriad subtle but delightful and amusing creative

design components, no two of his sculptures are exactly alike and all are fascinating and appealingly original. (Then again, the same might be said of Tim.)

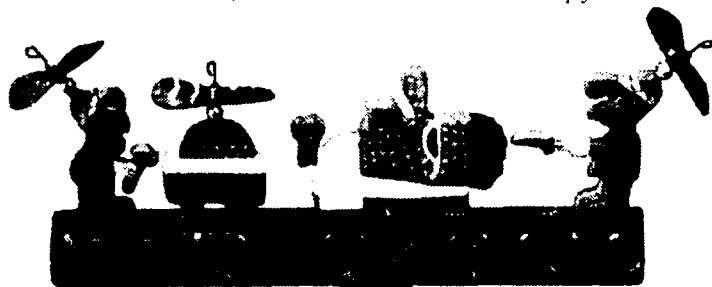
Reed has always dabbled in creating the outrageous and absurd, from music to art, but stumbled into his Whirligig making as a result of a contest—*International Exhibition of Wind Toys, Whirligigs and Weather Vanes* ("...or something like that.")—back in 1981. What followed was the birth of

more than two-hundred different design creations over the ensuing years. Still, there is a certain *family resemblance* to his Creachters—one that evolved out of the cartoon drawings Tim began in his adolescence. Take his *Cuticles Malloy* character, one he describes as a "blonde, chubby Marilyn Monroe type. In some she's a typist. I do her over and over. She is one of my favorites."

Other favorites of Reed's are his thirty-five or so "professional" pieces, Whirligig sculptures that reflect a *professional* line of work. There's *Dr. Bonard*, an orthopaedic surgeon who's gluing

and clamping a patient's leg; *Dr. Sniphoffer*, the plastic surgeon, the base of which is a marvelously carved nose; and *Dr. Rubb*, the chiropractor applying a jackhammer to his patient's back. Reed often does these as commissioned professional pieces which now make up approximately a third of his work.

Into the late '80s the demand for his pieces was so great that he sometimes employed assistants to keep up, reports Reed, who travels to ten to twelve shows around the country each year. And although sales are doing quite nicely these days, he describes a few years in the early '90s when sales slowed considerably. Reed credits this to an increase in the number of artists making similar creations, including at least one who—if the truth be told—was a bit of a *copycat*. "He



DR. BRAINERD



would take one thing that I did with a real whacky face, like the guy with his finger in the socket, and he'd do it over and over again—on mirrors, pieces of furniture," recalls Reed.

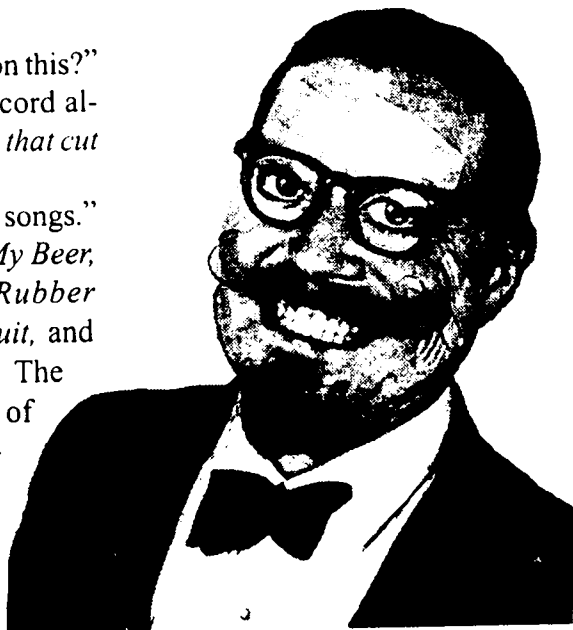
To become acquainted with Tim, to become familiar with his memorabilia and his art, is to become certain of its originality. Reflective of a vivid and obviously active imagination and a slightly—or maybe not so slightly—macabre sense of humor, Tim's personal memorabilia is full of the outrageous; just the way he likes it. Encased in his much-loved late mother's china cabinet is an assortment of his—well, uh—I'm not sure. There's a spider with a baby doll head. Oh, and then there's a Muppet with a knife in its head—a gift from his nephews who threw in an extra steak knife for a do-it-yourself kind of thing (I can see it now. "Gee, what can we give Uncle Tim for Christmas?").

And then...and then, there's the Rev. Fred Lane. Let me think. How should I describe him? Well, he's not really a reverend. "It's music. It has hardly anything to do with religion. It has a lot to do with psychosis,"

notes Reed

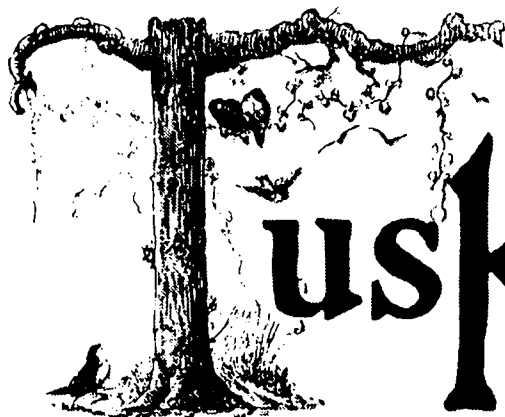
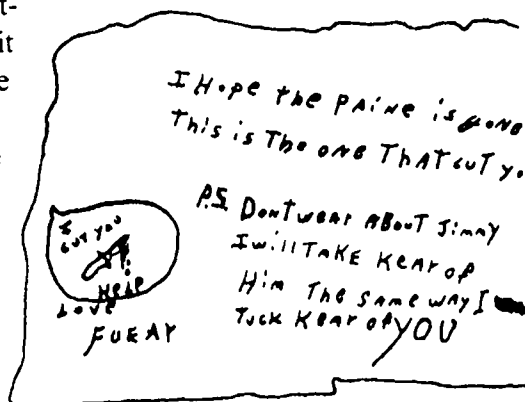
"Okay. Are you singing on this?" referring to Fred Lane's record album entitled, *"from the one that cut you."*

"Yeah, and I wrote all the songs." Songs such as *Danger is My Beer*, *I Talk to My Haircut*, *Rubber Room*, *Meat Clamp Conduit*, and *from the one that cut you*. The latter song, and the album of the same name, were inspired by a note that a friend of Tim Reed's...er, Fred Lane's... er, Tim Reed's found under the seat of a 1952 panel Dodge van delivery truck that had been parked in the Tennessee hills for awhile. The note (below) was wrapped around a hunting knife under the seat.



Rev. Fred Lane

"It's a love note, I guess," muses Reed. "So I wrote a song and then we put on a vaudeville-like show." The "we" he's referring to is a group of performance—and otherwise—artists who called themselves the *Raudelunas Revue*, and put on shows and concerts on and around the UA campus from the mid-'70s through the early '80s. "They were making stuff that was closer to Dadaism or surrealism," explains Reed,



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RICKSHAW TO GO

"and I just felt comfortable around them. They had the same sense of humor." Woodworker, Craig Nutt, was in the group as the persona, Ron 'Pate, who appears on the albums

with his *Debonairs*.

It was also during this period that Reed began experimenting with "junk art," creating collages and hybrids and a humorous line he called *Unusual Gift Ideas*. "I always liked to look through old magazines, old stuff. Things were more interesting to me if they were old, discarded and had lost its contemporary meaning," reflects Reed. He also published several newsletters including one called *Naked Women Overthrow the Government Quarterly*. And he made music—well, yeah—music.

In all, three albums were recorded: "*Raudelunas 'Pataphysical Revue*" starring Ron 'Pate's *Debonairs* and featuring Rev. Fred Lane; "*from the one that cut you*," starring Rev. Fred Lane with Ron 'Pate's *Debonairs*; and "*Car Radio Jerome*," starring Rev. Fred Lane and his Hittite Hot Shots.

And the records sold—and continue to sell—mainly in Europe. Today, "*from the one that cut you*" and "*Car Radio Jerome*" are available on CD, owned and distributed by the Knitting Factory, which bought the music in 1998. There is a "Search for Fred Lane" site on the worldwide web. Reed gets mail from a Fred Lane fan in Edinborough, Scotland and a German magazine is calling with a re-

quest to interview Rev. Fred Lane.

Good luck. The challenge when interviewing Tim Reed, or the Rev. Fred Lane, is determining when you're in on the joke and when the joke is on you. One thing is relatively certain, however, in the *nature vs. nurture* debate over the causes of psychosis, in Reed's case, nature wins. "I think Tim was just born that way," a colleague was quoted as recently saying.

In fact, Tim Reed grew up in the "normal" household of James T. and Frances Lee McGee Reed, as the youngest of their five children, on the old Eastwood Avenue, off of 15th street. "We were the Donna Reed family, lower-middle class." Tim's older brother, Jim, Tuskaloosa Magazine regular columnist, has been quoted as saying of their happy childhood.

So, what happened? We'll never know, but maybe it's better that way. We'll just call him a *creative genius* and continue to buy the delightful byproducts of his personal form of insanity—his art—his Whirligig Creachters.

But, beware. Tim says he'd like to return to the recording studio and maybe get some gigs. The search for the Rev. Fred Lane leads to Tuskaloosa. See him at Kentuck.

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