



Every alumnus knows the building,

a faded green structure that stands behind the central campus tennis courts, settled between Cro and the Plex. The squash court, a.k.a. “The Barn,” has long been a source of curiosity and intrigue. “Does anyone actually play squash in there?” was a frequent orientation question.

While no one has played squash in the Barn for years, the building is alive with energy. It is home to “Musicians Organized for Band Rights on Campus” (MOBROC), Conn’s innovative student club responsible for spawning bands like indie sensation Clap Your Hands Say Yeah (comprised of Alec Ounsworth '00, Tyler Sargent '00, Robbie Guertin '02, Lee Sargent '00 and Sean Greenhalgh '01) and avant-garde musician Graham Reynolds '93, score composer for this summer’s motion picture “A Scanner Darkly.”

“MOBROC is completely unique among our peer schools,” says Jonathan Tortora '07, current president of the 18-year-old club. “I get calls from musicians at other schools asking me how we pulled it off, desperate to learn how they can do the same.” Tortora’s enthusiasm spills like one of the drum solos he has honed since he began playing 17 years ago.

MOBROC

leaves the barn

MATTIAS ELGEMARK *Clap Your Hands Say Yeah, from left: Lee Sargent '00, Tyler Sargent '00, Sean Greenhalgh '01, Robbie Guertin '02 and Alec Ounsworth '00*

“Conn was definitely the incubator for Clap Your Hands Say Yeah.” — Sean Greenhalgh '01

“My friend Phil Alford '06 exemplifies what I call the MOBROC layer cake,” Tortora explains. “He’s an organic chemistry Ph.D. candidate at Dartmouth and plays music in several genres to relax. He says that MOBROC formed the core of his ability to play diversely, which subsequently ensures his sanity in grad school.”

Clap Your Hand drummer Sean Greenhalgh '01 agrees. “The opportunity in MOBROC is incredible because people with opposing musical ideologies are forced to get along. At any moment there might be bands who play funk metal, acid jazz, indie rock and hip-hop, all respecting each other and often jamming together.”

This might explain why Greenhalgh arrived at Conn a guitarist, plays drums for Clap Your Hands and, until recently, fronted a Guns and Roses tribute band, Mr. Brownstone. “Conn was definitely the incubator for Clap Your Hands, even though we didn’t come together until later,” Greenhalgh says.

The genesis of the band is not unusual for MOBROC alumni. The friends arrived in Brooklyn at various times, where the musical network looked like a Connecticut College alumni directory. The Barn was replaced with Flood Studios, a shared practice space with musicians stopping by, sitting in and generally experimenting with different genres and styles. Clap Your Hands came together a couple of years ago. Today they’re playing sold-out shows across the continent and in Europe.

Like Tortora, Conn’s artsy side appealed to Greenhalgh. “I knew Lee and Tyler (brothers and band members Lee and Tyler Sargent, both Class of 2000) from outside Boston and heard they were really into this musician’s club on campus. I also knew there was nothing else like it anywhere. So I chose Conn.”

Tortora explains the appeal this

way, “Conn allows me to study serious academics, and MOBROC allows me to pursue my dream of being a professional musician.”

Graham Reynolds '93 was already an accomplished pianist and composer when he arrived in New London. Today, he creates critically acclaimed, eclectic music as the founder of Golden Arm Trio in Austin, Texas. MOBROC’s influence proved invaluable.

“I arrived as a pianist but soon found myself playing drums for everything from metal to avant garde jazz, foregoing aesthetic choices for experience.” Reynolds remembers, “I wouldn’t have written music for ‘A Scanner Darkly’ without the opportunity to hone skills and explore varied directions at school.”

The Barn is a social center, where practice sessions run from 9 a.m. to midnight during the week and until 2 a.m. on weekends. Tortora says the use of the space varies from band to band. “Some bands like to hold intense two-hour practices with no visitors allowed. Others invite folks to stop by and hang out. Like most of college, you get out of it what you put into it.”

Certainly, Clap Your Hands and Graham Reynolds put a lot in and took a ton out. In addition, an incredible roster of MOBROC musicians are still plying their talents, especially when one considers that Conn isn’t a music school.

[See sidebar for more information on alumni bands.]

The Barn typically houses 12 drum kits, scores of guitars, keyboards and production equipment. Greenhalgh, as



Graham Reynolds '93



“The Barn.”

president of MOBROC in 2000, asked the Student Government Association for and received the organization’s first production equipment.

“We were kids in a candy store; it felt like we had a blank check to purchase what we needed. Suddenly, bands had amps, speakers and a soundboard to share.”

MOBROC doesn’t simply provide a building in which to jam, it includes a quasi-production company, providing numerous opportunities to perform and produce music on weekends and at Floralia, the annual spring festival.

Robbie Guertin '02, guitarist and keyboardist for Clap Your Hands found the production side as appealing as the musical one. A guitarist when he arrived, Guertin began designing posters for Robots in Disguise, a band that had never even practiced together. In a great marketing moment, the publicity about the mystery band generated enough buzz to pack their first gig.

“Conn gave me the chance to explore art and music,” Guertin re-

members. His sketches grace the band’s posters, t-shirts and CDs. “I took an art class my first semester, and I kept taking them. Musically, the Barn made it really easy to start a band. Everyone I knew played in four different bands. Plus, we had the added bonus of DJing on WCNI.”

He adds, “The Barn provided a very supportive, creative community that was all about music, where we could be ourselves without worry of social or academic ramifications. It was a musical education for each of us.”

Reynolds, who began playing piano again as a senior (when prompted by a MOBROC bandmate) concurs about the importance of WCNI. “I used to DJ late at night; I would layer all sorts of tracks, like Metallica with Chet Baker, then I would see what I could replicate musically, create a sound collage,” he says.

It is not surprising that Reynolds was tapped to compose the music for “A Scanner Darkly,” a motion picture that, though heavy with star power, is experimental in nature.

Like Reynolds, Guertin feels that he owes some of his success to MOBROC. “There is a lot of luck and good timing with Clap Your Hands current success but also a lot of MOBROC, because alumni bring their friends out to see our shows, even filling smaller halls, which always impresses the booking agents.”

Current club president Tortora sees more benefits coming from the club’s alumni. “MOBROC has three big goals this year. Most importantly, we want to preserve the Barn, so we’re hosting an alumni benefit concert. We’re also launching a Web site that features current and former members of MOBROC, an opportunity to hook

up musically, to see and hear what people are doing,” says Tortora. “Our goal is to ensure that the good, the bad, the ugly and the truly beautiful music making continues at Conn College for as long as there is a Conn College.” ●

For music samples and more information go to www.clapyourhandssayyeah.com and www.grahamreynolds.com.

A sampling of CC bands and musicians

Sam Bigelow '99 (Boston)
www.sambigelow.com

Boss Tweed (Brooklyn)
with Gerard Egan '01 and Carolyn Sills '00

Cankickers (New London)
www.myspace.com/cankickers
with Daniel Spurr '99, Daniel Thompson '99 and Doug Schaefer '02

Dead Men's Hollow (Washington, D.C.)
www.deadmenshollow.com
with Amy Rogers-Nazarov '90

Oneside (Boston)
www.onesidemusic.com
with Ian Knox '02 and Ned deBary '02

Palomar (New York City)
www.palomarnyc.com
with Rachel Warren '93

Ringers (New London)
www.myspace.com/ringers
with Ben Johnson '04

Social Hero (New York City)
www.socialhero.com
with David Lloyd '04

Takka Takka (Brooklyn)
www.takkatakamusic.com
with Gabe Levine '98

Andrew Thompson '98 (Brooklyn)
www.golfandracquetclub.com

If you are a working band, doing original music and would like to be included on the MOBROC Web site, contact Jonathan Tortora '07 at jrtor@conncoll.edu.