

Monday, August 21, 2006

# Concert Review: The Embarrassment

*Roadtrip to Wichita*

BY JOHN CLARKE



Photo by John Clarke

Bill Gofrier of The Embarrassment. (Or the Embos, if you're a cool kid.)

WICHITA, KANSAS — Why would a man who just got over the flu, get in his car and drive 5 and half hours north from Dallas to Wichita, KS, on Saturday?

If you listened to college radio in the early 1980's you'd know why. **The Embarrassment**, the most successful band to ever come out of Wichita, played a reunion show on Saturday. They haven't done that in

more than 20 years. While I'm not that familiar with their music, I adore Big Dipper, the Boston band that The Embos morphed into around 1986. Big Dipper's lead singer, Bill Gofrier, had turned his so-called blister pop into the kind of phenomenon that caught on on college campuses even before REM hit it big.

I was jacking around on the internet a few weeks ago and saw that the Embos were playing again in Wichita for a documentary that a guy from Brooklyn is making. He called them all up for interviews and they told him that it would be better if they got together and played so he could see the chemistry. So he found a place for them to play, a promoter, and dorks like me didn't think twice about driving from two states away to see this.

The Embos play in this 1920's roadhouse near a railroad tracks called The Road House Blues. This place could not have been cooler. It was made of stone, has excellent acoustics and holds about 250 people, all of whom smoke and eat a lot of beef. The people who showed were all in their 40s and likely went to either KU, Wichita State or Missouri State, where the Embos had a huge following.

I roll into town just after sound check and I sit down with Bill Gofrier for about 30 minutes. He's now an art teacher in Boston. I told him that that Big Dipper's best album, Heavens, is out of print. I ask him who has the rights. "We do" he says. He also says the guitarist, Gary Wallach, who's now a producer for a public radio station in Boston, has a whole Big Dipper album worth of material that has been unreleased. They don't have a label. I tell him I know a guy in Dallas who'd love to release their records. We can only hope.

The show was just like a 1982 Embos show --- except the guys on stage all looked more like they would be better at selling you insurance than rocking you. But they blasted out "I'm a Don Juan", "Sex Drive" and "Elizabeth Montgomery's Face" in rapid succession during a two set two and a half hour show that gave everybody their 20 bucks worth. It was easily worth the 10 hours in the car to hear this. The highlight of the show was the single Big Dipper song they played, "Ron Klaus Wrecked His House" which is about the Embos bass player who held a party with 1,000 people, a band, and a sledgehammer the night before his rent house on Indiana Street in Wichita was going

to be condemned. The Ron and the party goers destroyed the place, the cops came, and a legend was born. If it works, I've included a video clip of the song with this article, featuring Gofrier playing a mean ukalale.

Then I slept at the worst motel in Wichita, The Ward Motel, about two blocks away that had sticky carpet and a broken smoke detector, for a few hours before heading back to Dallas.

I'm glad I went. And maybe, just maybe, that trip may make it possible for even more people to hear Big Dipper.

*This review originally appeared on [John's blog](#).  
Video to come as soon as we figure out how to get it  
uploaded without breaking the Internet.*