



Rank professionals

In the band Ranky Tanky, longtime friends and musicians celebrate Gullah culture

By **Bridget Callahan**
StarNews correspondent

Gullah refers to the vibrant amalgamation of cultures that sprung up after West African people were enslaved and shipped off to toil in the rice plantations of coastal South Carolina centuries ago. Gullah can be a style of music, cuisine, dialect and art, a blending of what each separate West African culture brought with them to the rice fields.

On Thursday, Oct. 19, the University of North Carolina Wilmington's Kenan Auditorium will be swinging heavy with the sounds of Low Country Gullah music courtesy of the Charleston, S.C., band Ranky Tanky, which is playing as part of the UNCW Presents series in collaboration with the Upperman African-American Cultural Center.

"With regards to music, it all starts with the rhythm. Rhythm is definitely the driving force. We interpret songs, poems, hymns," said Charlton Singleton, Ranky Tanky's trumpet player.

He said the audience will hear lots of gospel and jazz influences, all branching off that mother rhythm.

"It feels as if most people are not really sure of what to expect from our performances," he said. "But

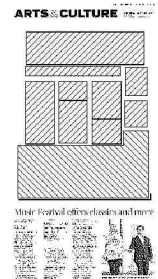
when the music starts they immediately are drawn in."

The band is full of old friends. Singleton, Quentin Baxter, Kevin Hamilton and Clay Ross all met in South Carolina in the '90s. Fresh out of school, they formed a jazz quartet.

"Fast forward about 15 years to when Clay had the idea of celebrating the Gullah culture with this presentation," Singleton said. "We decided to add a vocalist and immediately turned to Quiana (Parler), whom we've all known for some years as well. So Ranky Tanky is only a couple of years old, but we go way back as friends and musicians."

Parler is a nationally recognized vocalist who was called "Charleston's best event entertainer" by the Charleston City Paper. Singleton is the artistic director and conductor for the Charleston Jazz Orchestra, and Grammy-nominated drummer Baxter is a founding board member of Jazz Artists of Charleston and an adjunct professor of jazz studies at the College of Charleston. Between the five band members there's no shortage of accolades, but Ranky Tanky is also a labor of love between musicians who grew up together in the Low Country scene.

"Most band mates will tell you it is all of the funny times off of the bandstand that translate to



great moments on the bandstand,” Singleton said. “Every night there is something happening up there that wows somebody or inspires someone.”

Expect an evening of music that makes you want to dance, laugh and sometimes cry, but that never fails to hit that emotional mark.

Contact StarNews arts and entertainment at 910-343-2343.

Want to go?

Who: Ranky Tanky, playing for the UNCW Presents series in cooperation with the Upperman African-American Cultural Center.

When: 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 19

Where: Kenan Auditorium, UNCW campus

Info: Tickets are \$15-\$40

Details: 910-962-3500 or UNCW.edu/Presents

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Charleston Gullah music band Ranky Tanky is, from left, Charlton Singleton (trumpet, vocals), Clay Ross (guitar, vocals), Quiana Parler (vocals), Quentin E. Baxter (drums) and Kevin Hamilton (bass). [CONTRIBUTED PHOTO]