

**A Balancing Act: UNC English professor on tour as rock 'n' roll artist**  
**Annie Ham**  
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Two rock 'n' roll albums, a current East coast tour and teaching classical literature to college students are all things that Florence Dore — a tenured professor in the UNC English and Comparative Literature department — can put on her resume.

“It turns out ballads are really important to how we understand literature, so I got to bring together my two passions: literature and music,” she said.

While Dore said she wishes she would have studied music in college, she finds rock 'n' roll music to be an “amateur’s game” that allows those interested in the genre to learn and gain musical skills on their own.

Dore has also found a way to collaborate literature and rock 'n' roll through her research. She has written three books, including "Novel Sounds: Southern Fiction in the Age of Rock and Roll," and her newest "The Ink in the Grooves: Conversations on Literature and Rock 'n' Roll."

Bland Simpson, a professor of English and creative writing at the University, said Dore’s talent was immediately apparent throughout the interview process.

“I was just knocked out by Florence and her energy and the power of her thought,” Simpson said.

Dore’s songwriting class is popular among many UNC students, he said.

Her position as both a professor and musician is a balancing act. However, she finds her students to be her number one priority. She said it is important that students understand the mystical and strange process of writing music.

“When you’re doing literary criticism or literary writing you’re thinking and analyzing,” Dore said. “When you’re doing creative writing, like songwriting, you’re sort of trying not to think in a way. You’re trying to do a craft, you’re trying to create something. It’s like you’re waiting to be visited.”

Daniel Wallace, a UNC English professor, said the success of Dore’s classes is shown through a final concert her students put on to showcase the songs they have written throughout the semester.

“Through that, you can see quite easily the effect that she has on these students, allowing them an opportunity to do something they’ve always wanted to do — which is perform, write songs and produce a CD,” Wallace said.

After stepping away from her musical career for many years, Dore revisited songwriting for herself over the course of summer, resulting in her most recent album “Highways and Rocketships.”

She wrote around 25 songs, not knowing exactly what the album would sound like. The end result was a ten song album with rock ‘n’ roll and country influences strung throughout.

Libby Rodenbough, previous student of Dore's and member of the band [Mipso](#), said Dore accomplished the often difficult feat of showing her enthusiasm for the books she assigned in class. Rodenbough said it was easy to engage with Dore because she did not put herself on a pedestal of authority like some other professors.

Rodenbough’s career as a professional musician was partly inspired by Dore, especially after Dore shared with Rodenbough that she was on tour when she got her PhD.

“That kind of blew my mind,” Rodenbough said in a text. “I haven’t pursued any more degrees at this point, but I think the feeling that I could do other things is pretty essential to me not feeling trapped, which is one of the fundamental battles of adulthood.”

While Rodenbough only took one of Dore’s classes, she said she had the opportunity to reconnect with Dore through a fundraiser project for Cat’s Cradle at the beginning of the pandemic, when small businesses were struggling to stay afloat.

The goal of the virtual project, "Cover Charge: N.C. Musicians Go Under Cover," was not only to raise money, but also to bring people together through the power of music during a difficult time in the world.

Dore said she cannot emphasize enough the importance of community collaboration. She said she hopes that through similar projects, UNC can better use its resources as a large university to benefit the Chapel Hill and Carrboro areas.

Dore is currently on what she calls a “traveling public humanities tour” with her band. Dore’s shows are unique, with many being held in libraries and art spaces. Carrying on with her highly held belief that rock ‘n’ roll and literature are essential to each other, Dore talks about her books and invites different poets and authors to speak at her concerts as well.

“It’s good to be human; it’s good to be alive,” Dore said. “I think literature and songs help us know that. It makes life meaningful.”