

## Long John Baldry still finds thrills in music

Interview and review  
by Randal Smathers

The English Hoochie Coochie man was in town last week. Better known as Long John Baldry, this veteran of 30 years of rock and blues did three shows at Club 67.

Baldry started fronting blues bands in England in the late fifties, and has gained much of his fame from his finds and sidemen: Rod Stewart, Elton John and Charlie Watts, to name a few. For people who remember or have researched that era in music, Baldry is a legend.

"I get that response quite a bit," Baldry said. "Of course there are a lot of young people who have never heard of me, and younger people may have heard of me in various books that have been written about rock and roll over the years." Part of the barrier to younger fans is the fact that "ninety-nine percent of the places I play are licensed establishments, which certainly precludes them," said Baldry.

Baldry is nothing if not versatile. In June, he was touring to great reviews with a nine-piece backup band. For his Edmonton dates, he has only three old friends along: Kathi McDonald on vocals, Papa John King on lead/slide guitar, and Butch Coulter on harmonica.

McDonald is an eleven year veteran of Baldry's band, Coulter has been doing odd dates for the same period and is now "a full member of the Baldry band", and King has been on board for 'only' four years. This kind of familiarity has made this quartet into the most seamless blues band in Edmonton since Albert King blew the Convention Centre away two years ago.

Coulter is an absolute wizard on harmon-

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ica. Crisp, sharp notes to slurs — all sound easy. It is a rare occasion when you hear a harp man good enough that you don't miss a saxophone even once in a show: Coulter is that good.

"Papa" King is everything you could ask for in a sideman. His guitar work is impeccable, and his stage presence quiet, so the lead man gets the spotlight. His solos, when it is his turn up front, are imaginative — not deriva-

tive, as is too often the case.

McDonald has a classic voice for the blues. She has range and power that let her move from Billie Holiday's mournful "God Bless the Child" to a roomshaking duet with Baldry on "Spoonful".

If the backup band was great, so was Baldry. His voice and rapport with the audience were the keys to his performance. He gave plenty of room to his band, but he was clearly the leader, especially on "Hoochie Coochie Man" and "A Thrill is a Thrill". The latter sounded so good in its acoustic version, one wonders if it could possibly

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sound as good with a full band. Certainly it was a cut above the cut on vinyl that was a radio hit in 1979.

"It's a rarity for me to do this in Edmonton. I guess most people know me for my band performances," Baldry said. This is the third time Baldry has been in town with a small group to do blues and folk.

"It's something I wouldn't want to do all the time," Baldry commented. "I still enjoy the heat, the passion, of being up there with the band. This is a much more laid back thing, in fact I sit through much of the evening's performance because I never did learn to play guitar standing up. But that's how I started out. I didn't sing with a band until the early sixties, so I was my own accompanist. It's nice to get the guitar out now and again, 'coz I get no opportunity to play the guitar with the band, other than two or three numbers, but this way I get to play for three hours or so, which is nice."

After this much time, why does Baldry keep going with his music? "I think it's my relationship with audiences. There's that element in my psyche, that is a show-off. I guess that's got to be there with most artists, that 'Hey look at me.'"

It follows then that Baldry must prefer live to studio work. "I always have done. I'd like to put out a live album," said Baldry. "We sort of did last September, but it's never officially been on release. Apart from that, I've never done a live album, and commercially, of course, I haven't had a great deal of success in the last few years, so I would really have to



Baldry is a blues and rock legend

wait until I had a really hot studio album, before bringing out a live album" on its coattails.

Baldry is branching out, looking for new challenges. "I'm making my debut in North American pictures next year," he said. His first role will be a cameo of "a deranged, psychotic psychiatrist." Next May, however, Baldry will be a star in *Prey*, "as opposed to the PTL form," Baldry said. "It's a detective thriller with vampires, and I play the detective, hunting down the criminal of criminals."

Baldry's English accent, though subdued by years in Canada, still comes through on certain words. Vampires, for instance, comes out "Vam-pie-ahs", not an untheatrical effect. One can imagine this tall bearded blond with the deep voice being a good actor.

"Well, I had a lot of stage acting experience in England, which of course requires more discipline," Baldry said. I began to wonder what the man hasn't done. "Not too many things I haven't tried, I suppose."

commented Baldry.

Still, music is the reason Baldry is in town, and tonight he plays the blues. "For many years I have been criticized as being too bluesy, whether it be record companies or people in the media, then there comes this supposed blues revival happening right now, and I put out an album, which has several bluesy tracks," says Baldry, laughing. "And then it goes the other way, and I'm criticized for it not being bluesy enough."

Baldry in conversation has an even more arresting voice than live or on record. "I guess it is one of the most distinguished voices in rock and roll, blues whatever. People who know my music recognise it in whatever guise," said Baldry, referring to one of his projects, doing voice-overs for commercials. "People actually tend to recognize my voice before they recognize me. It's very odd. I can be somewhere doing some shopping and not get bothered one piece, but as soon as I say, 'Oh what is the price of that please, or may I have this,' they say 'Oh aren't you Long John Baldry?' They know the voice."

## Coltman debuts as director in *Schedules*

Interview by Rosa Jackson

Greg Coltman, the affable director of Theatre Network's current production *Schedules*, has not had any trouble finding work since graduating from the University of Alberta's B.F.A. Drama Program three years ago.

This may seem unusual, as the theatre is known for being a difficult world to break into. But Coltman has a ready explanation for this success. "On the one hand I have been very lucky, but on the other hand, I have always been willing to take on different tasks in the theatre."

This adaptability has made a wide variety of projects available to Coltman. His love for youth and his social concern are evident in those which he chooses to undertake. He has taught at Alberta Culture's "Artsrek," a summer drama program for teenagers, and will be coordinating the upcoming "Theatre Blitz North" at Theatre Network, which is a workshop for high school playwrights. "I

enjoy the process of refining and communicating ideas," he says. "It's amazing how many young people can learn."

Coltman has maintained his own enthusiasm for acting through short-term contracts with Catalyst Theatre which, as its name indicates, encourages reaction. He performed in *Feeling Yes*, *Feeling No*, a show directed at young children.

How did the B.F.A. Acting Program prepare him for a career as a director? "The program is geared toward acting, but I gained an understanding of the actor's approach to the theatre which is very valuable," says Coltman. "Directing is not a matter of telling actors what to do. The most important thing is how well you can communicate your notions of the play to them and incorporate their notions throughout the rehearsal process."

*Schedules* is Coltman's professional debut as a director. For the past two seasons, he served as Assistant Director to Stephen

Healey, the Artistic Director of Theatre Network. He assisted in the direction of *The Last Bus* by Raymond Storey and *Kristallnacht* by Richard Epp.

"It's not going to change anybody's life," Coltman says of *Schedules*, "but we can all identify with the characters — sometimes even a bit too closely! And we can laugh with them, because we've all been just as loony. It's a very realistic play; at the end, not all their problems are solved, but at least they are making attempts to solve them."

Although the play's subject matter of family conflict has been dealt with many times before, especially on T.V., Coltman and the actors Susan Sneath and James Downing agreed that they "didn't want to give a safe distance with the play and present it like a sit-com. We wanted to hit home." In this aim, Coltman succeeded. In fact, things are going so well on the whole for him at Theatre Network that he has indefinite plans to continue working there. "It's very much an artist's theatre," he says.

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