

More than the luck of the Irish

Concert review by Kitchener Prijitt

For the homesick Irish, it was like kissing the old sod. For the rest of us, it was a vision of Ireland through the delicate beauty and fire of its traditional music. And for the Chieftains, it was further proof of their international success and of the growing recognition of their artistry.

In the midst of a current three week tour of the United States and Canada, Paddy Maloney and the boys stopped just long enough in Edmonton last Friday to give what the sold out audience at SUB had hoped for: jigs, reels, and the impeccable airs of Carolan, the blind, 17th century Irish itinerant harpist and composer.

I didn't know what to expect when the Chieftains stepped on stage for the second show. Grouped in a semi-circle, rather sedate, they looked like an odd collection of Sunday School teachers, chartered accountants and unemployed Guinness drinkers. But when they picked up their instruments and swung into the reel, "Drowsy Maggie," appearances suddenly didn't matter.

The Chieftains' forte is the older traditional music of Ireland. They are primarily an instrumental group though Kevin Conneff, normally busy on bodran, sang "Rambling Boys of Pleasure," a song rumored to be the inspiration for Yeats' "Down by the Sally Garden." As a group they veer away from the robust, political and bawdy ballads of people like the Clancy Brothers, and their music ignores the modernist influence that characterizes groups like the Bothy Band and Planxty.

The six members of Chieftains are all excellent musicians, collectively and individually. At one point in the concert they performed solos; their "party pieces" as Maloney called them. I liked the harp playing by Derek Bell, and of course Paddy Maloney is a whiz on the uilleann pipes, but for my money I'll always take Matt Malloy. Surely one of the best flautists in the world, Malloy demonstrated amazing technique as he performed a medley of reels. It sounded almost as if he was playing with a drone as one



Manly yes, but Ken liked them too. Martin Fay and Derek Bell of the traditional Irish group, the Chieftains.

note hummed away beneath the melody.

The Chieftains have recorded eight albums over the long course of their career. They drew from these albums and introduced pieces from their upcoming album, *Boil the Breakfast Early*. In addition, they performed music from the Stanley Kubrick film *Barry Lyndon*. It's hard to pick out the highlights of such an enjoyable concert although one piece very well

received was the delightful, conceptual, "Fairies' Lamentation," a day in the fairies' life told in musical form.

When the concert was over, the audience was reluctant to let the Chieftains leave. Little wonder. It's not every night that Edmonton music fans have the chance to listen to six such obviously genial and musical Irishmen.

Thawing out from another humorless winter

Revue review by Michaleen Marte-Elabdi

Canadians are enjoying the resurrection of a favorite institution this season. The perennial delight is *Spring Thaw*, a comedy revue which has not been produced for ten years. Edmonton audiences virtually glowed with amusement when the show visited SUB Theatre last week. Indeed, *Spring Thaw* could have a healthy future once again, providing Canadians with an annual respite from a long, cold winter season.

Spring Thaw is undoubtedly something we can call our own. The intent of the revue is to have Canadians laugh at themselves and their country. It's all in the content of a rich and entertaining program: the "Ten Lost Years of Trudeau," the highlight in the life of Joe Clark, our beloved cultural gods like Tom Thompson and the Boys or the marvellous Stratford Festival, a jingle for Maggie, our sore thumb in the postal system, the stripping down of the All Canadian Girl and everyone's ticket to heaven — The Lottery. All of this and more draws the picture of the Canadian, his sex, his politics, his suspicion of the modern multinational, his humble role of good samaritan: his own unique world.

So who says Canadians have no sense of humor?

Who has declared us to be bland and boring? Even I was convinced otherwise. I thought much of the show was pretty damn funny. I mean, can you imagine election coverage in 1984 for the ninth time in the year, led by the dog-tired and downright bitchy trio of Dalton Cramp, Knowlton Rash and Barbara Frump? Or what about the portrait of the immovable, stuffy, self-satisfied civil servant who judges success by being moved close enough to see the clock? Or how about a Ben Wicks version of receiving your baggage at the proper destination through Air Canada? Any thoughts on this? Or consider the black, jewish, female gimp who is also a losing PC in a prestigious Ontario riding?

Those were just a few of my favorites. *Spring Thaw* came off as a crisp, clever and sparkling production. The cast consists of six men and women, with standouts like Mary Anne McDonald, Paul Brown and Rosemary Radcliffe delivering the songs and sketches with great finesse.

A collection of over 20 different dramatic and musical composers have made for an extremely versatile program. The show ran smoothly and was balanced by inserting short, uproarious skits amid the longer ones. There appeared to be something for

everyone's taste: like Paul Brown's first encounter with downhill skiing, Patrick Young's sermon on the good Canadian, Brenda Bradley's "Modern Love Song", Mary Anne McDonald's soulful "Lottery Song" or the gutsy "Silent Majority Blues" by Rosemary Radcliffe.

At this point *Spring Thaw* is hardly one third of the way through a long national tour. This makes for the unique quality of the revue. Depending on the region that *Spring Thaw* visits, appropriate skits and numbers will be written and performed while others are deleted. In deference to Alberta, the Oil Appeal was performed, which is a kind of telethon designed to donate funds to Peter and the destitute oil corporations. Not a word was mentioned of the Quebec referendum in the show. It was probably assumed that this part of the country could care less about it.

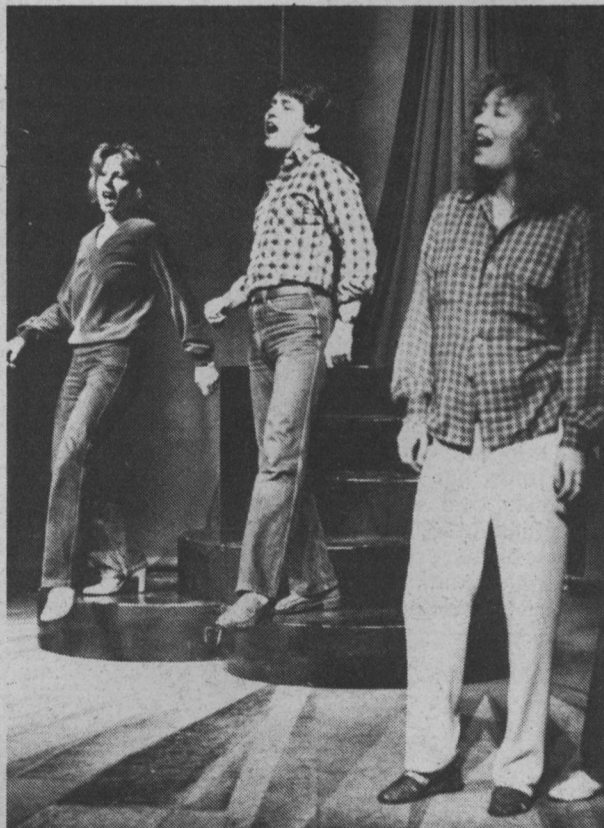


photo Rick Ljwrence

So you missed *Spring Thaw* this time. I would advise you not to miss it next year. As a matter of fact I will be able to catch it in Regina this week. Hmmm — I wonder what specialties they might have up their sleeve. Maybe Dick Calver as the elected senator of the 52nd state of Saskatchewan?

By the way, have you guessed the highlight in the life of Joe Clark? Sorry, I'm not going to tell you. Stick around for *Spring Thaw* next year and maybe by then you'll know.



Let's see, who's going to be victim of the next editorial? Actually, this fellow's just part of the Discovering Dinosaurs exhibit at the Provincial Museum. The exhibit includes a free film series with movies like *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* and *One Million B.C.*