

# Cooder displays musical abilities

by Keith Layton

The Students' Union press release for Sunday's Ry Cooder concert tells us "there's something special about the way Ry Cooder doesn't write his own songs that make one wish nobody else did either." That sounds rather contradictory, or rather, ambiguous. It really.

Cooder is the epitome of a student. He takes a eclectic approach to learning a musical idiom which takes into account the socio-cultural forces behind the music's existence. His finger-picking styles come out of rag-time and tin pan alley, his slide guitar and mandolin come out of early country blue. His steel guitar and slack key come out of Hawaiian styles, the former of which had had a significant, yet generally unacknowledged influence on country blues. Ry Cooder has assembled a cross-section of generative forces in American music—and he has lived the music. He has gone through learning processes that have gone beyond structure and have revealed to him the essence of the music he plays. There is something special about the way he doesn't write songs.

Cooder's array of styles and idioms were performed, interestingly enough, in the order they were named. The evening began with Cooder's treatment of a couple of rag-time tunes and, unfortunately, with sound problems. The sound problems took the form of the absence of a stage monitor for his guitar. Cooder, the sensitive musician he is, seemed loath to continue under the circumstances, but did anyway.

Cooder's playing was affected while the sound problems continued. Before an ongoing discussion with the sound technician finally resolved the problems, his rag-time stint was over and his potentially brilliant finger-picking was marred by inability to properly hear himself. The fast runs with their subtle inflections were often off time and his not wanting to play under that kind of circumstance was understandable.

With the sound problems solved, Cooder's performance improved dramatically and his well-known *fool* and *cigarette* realized his potential. The blues to follow were superb though his voice lacks somewhat



Ry Cooder performing at SUB Theatre

photo Grant Wurm

the requisite range for that sort of thing. His slide guitar rates well enough to put him amongst the very finest of exponents. Cooder's finger picking abilities are no doubt an asset here with their subtle intricacies so well developed. These closely articulated subtleties provided a foil for the extended, crying slide notes that made for a complete unit rather than one which, as is often the case, relies heavily on the charms, and perhaps, gimmickery, of the slide.

Cooder's mandolin playing was also of top quality and his delivery of the late Johnny Young's *kid man blues* was superb. The Hawaiian music, which is a more recent development in Cooder's musical accumulation, seemed very much in tone with his presence at the

concert. It is possible that his shirt had something to do with it too, but his relaxed easy manner reflected the essential qualities of the music. Needless to say, his lessons were well learned here, as well.

Paul Hann and bassist Skip Cuts (as he was introduced) opened the show with an assemblage of bawdy songs, not-so-bawdy songs, serious and not-so-serious songs. His delivery was entertaining and professional. It seems that he is doing really well with his chosen image and his chosen profession. Worse things could happen to AM radio than the insight and enigma of the Cockney Cowboy. Take Patsy Gallant for example, or Paul McCartney, or Manfred Mann, or The Captain and Tennille or...

# Last Tycoon—believable and successful

by Dave Samuel

The Last Tycoon (Westmount B) directed by Elia Kazan

The *Last Tycoon* is the best screen adaptation of an Scott Fitzgerald novel to date. Elia Kazan has surpassed other directors in his translation from page to screen because he has, with the aid of Harold Pinter, incorporated a genuine understanding of the Fitzgerald hero into his film. Whereas the Jay Gatsby of *The Great Gatsby* was a failure, the Monroe Stahr of *The Last Tycoon* succeeds.

Part of the reason for this success lies in the fact that Kazan was innovative enough to cast unknown Bridgette Boucher in the female lead. The role is not one which demands great acting talents, since the essence of the characterization is that she is mysterious: she does not reveal her inner self to Stahr. The role does demand an actress who is decidedly not the Hollywood type — big bust, plastic features, etc. Boucher fills this need perfectly because of her rather unique face and figure, more of a fashion model's than that of an actress. She is a believable framework around which a man of Stahr's calibre, who has his pick of conventional

Hollywood beauties, can create his own image of feminine perfection.

All of Stahr's passion for something finer than the mediocrity from which he must fashion his mass-produced films is concentrated into his infatuation with Boucher. Like the framework of the beach-house Stahr is building, and his concept for a quality Hollywood movie, she is to Stahr the suggestion of experience on a higher level than the tawdry one presented in the film.

The pathos which is so palpably present at the end of *The Last Tycoon* is created by the way in which Kazan shows Stahr to be so much superior to the characters surrounding him. There is a touching contrast between Stahr's vision of the potential in other human beings and the sort of people they turn out to be. Stahr finally wastes himself trying to make contact with an idealism in others which he alone seems to possess.

There are weak points: Stahr's tragic end could have been emphasized more strongly; the black and white cuts, ostensibly from the thirties, are distracting because their technical quality is too high. These faults are not sufficient to substantially detract from an intelligent, soundly constructed film.



Goodgrass

The Good Brothers - identical twins Bruce (autoharp), Brian (guitar), and Larry (banjo) — will be appearing at SUB Theatre, Monday, March 14. They, along with their sidemen have spread Goodgrass (as they prefer to call their brand of bluegrass) from one side of the country to the other, drawing packed houses from the Maritimes to Vancouver. Their popularity has spread slowly but purposefully, for five years, mostly by word of mouth. The Goods deliver — night after night, week after week, to the delight of audiences at concerts, festivals, clubs and pubs. Television and radio appearances have helped spread the word, and the group now has a recording contract with RCA

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