

Three encores and more

by Andrew Gillis

The Good Brothers and their bluegrass band from Richmond Hill, Ontario are such cool performers that by the end of their Friday night concert at Prince Andrew High School in Dartmouth, they had a running conversation going with their audience.

It was far from a sold-out audience, too, and that normally makes everyone in the building tense. Gary Stanhope, the promoter, introduced warm-up singer Michael Forbes with an acknowledgement of the empty seats. This, combined with the lowering of the lights, released a lot of tension. So did the casual and well-rehearsed Forbes. He was clearly able to work with a concert audience, even though he is a metro area boy (used to the Hollis Street envelope, Ginger's) and his material deals not with far-away Ocean Boulevards, but with Spring Garden Roads close to home.

So Forbes was a big success. His version of Cockburn's "Goin' Down The Road" was Canadian and Maritime, relevant and moving... really ours, the audience thought, and gave Forbes solid applause at the end of his set.

The Good Brothers are Larry (banjo man, with many Earl Scruggs moves) and the roughly-identical twins Brian (lead vocals and guitar) and Bruce (autoharp, guitar and vocals). They are helped by a bassist and drummer, and a guy named Carl Keys from Kitchener, Ontario, on electric fiddle, electric guitar and electric mandolin. This six-piece band is rehearsed to the point where mistakes - not tragic in bluegrass and even modern country - never

ever occur, and bad taste - like too much volume, big solos or long breaks between songs - is pretty much impossible.

None of this means any lack of spontaneity for The Good Brothers. Brian Good, who did almost all lead vocals, has mastered the between-songs chat. When all those lights are obliterating the performer's view of the audience, the performer often can come up with some idle junk between songs. Without his intention, this talk can seem conceited, and very unattractive to the audience. Forbes almost slipped into this earlier, the way Ted Jordan did when warming up Leon Redbone; Forbes spoke solemnly of a fellow Halifax songwriter as a "good, good friend of mine" for lack of anything better to say, which to the person listening sounds too personal, - a confession putting the speaker one-up on us. Brian Good was at ease, however. He couldn't have sounded patronizing if he had wanted to. He even spoke to a nine-year old in the front row with a dedication, while most performers, with kids around, are trite. Not Good.

So expert was the Good Brothers rapport that by the end of a one-hour fifty-minute set, the audience was calling out any comment that came to mind, and the performers were responding like friends. The dedication to the kid was a song called "Kitty Star" ("and I love you more than airplanes, Kitty Star"). The song was typical of the Brothers' bluegrass catalogue. They did all the goodies: "Up Against The Wall, Redneck Mothers", "Dueling Banjos", "Foggy Mountain Breakdown", "Fox On The Run", and



The Good Brothers get down to some good old, down home bluegrass music. These boys appeared recently at Prince Andrew High in Dartmouth.

every other country song with across-the-board appeal. No corny pedal steel guitars, but always an authentic country sound, with good ear for tradition.

Spontaneity: Brian Good, at the first of three encore numbers, happened to ask "What should we do now?" and in unison some people (he had been bantering with them all night, I suppose) took the cue to call out, in unison: "Orange Blossom Special!" The Good Brothers played it immediately, complete with build-ups, fade-outs, hand-clapping bits and breaks for

Carl Keys to zap in some phased violin (which really sounded like a train). It was the best "Orange Blossom Special" anyone had heard; better than by Johnny Cash's band, Conway Twitty's Twitty Birds, or Maurice Bolyer with Wilf Carter's Band.

Asked back for another encore, with calls for "one more", Brian Good strolled out and asked "How about two more?" That was typical of the evening.

The Good Brothers' new album on RCA records is **Pretty Ain't Good Enough**.

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