

Spirit of the West ages gracefully

BY TIM COVERT

Spirit of the West (SOTW) is a band getting older only in years — they still play with youthful intensity and energy. This was obvious in the animated responses they received from the youthful crowd that danced and hollered its approval last Saturday night at the McInnes Room.

The Vancouver based band launched into its set of celtic-tinged rock with "D for Democracy" and the quirky "And if Venice is Sinking". Besides the usual crowd favourites from their last five albums, SOTW also played a healthy selection of material from their newest CD "Two-Headed".

Singer/guitarist John Mann confessed to the crowd that the members of the band have had their ideals altered and changed with their age and their experience as parents. Mann said the songs on the album reflect some of the more "redneck" feelings of the members have had to confront. It's the conflict between these feelings and their lifelong liberal attitudes that became the duality of "Two-Headed".

The new songs are less celtic influenced than in previous efforts; this is in accordance with the direction the band has been heading the past few records. These songs also seemed to be a little less intense, but that feeling may be attributed to the crowd's unfamiliarity with the new material.

There was an angry tune called "Pin-Up Boy" that had a vigilante-like attitude towards pedophiles and an up-beat song



Spirit of the West vocalist and guitarist John Mann

about euthanasia called "Unplugged." This examination of their mortality and the protection of their children illustrate the band's progression into middle age.

However, the band was given no physical indication whatsoever of their years as they leaped and grooved across the stage, immersing themselves completely in the music and enthusiastic crowd response. SOTW added some new twists to their standard repertoire, replacing some flute solos with harmonica solos and changing a couple of the arrangements. It was disconcerting to me, merrily singing along to "Political", to find that the vocal melody had been changed in one of my favourite tunes. In retrospect, though, it shows that SOTW is a band that's healthy and not in danger of letting their older hits stagnate.

The band ended off their set with "Save This House" and the crowd favourite "Home For a

Rest". During the latter song the crowd was cheering and singing along raucously and the noise continued unabated until the band came back out, beaming, for a three-song encore.

Geoffrey Kelly told the crowd that they hadn't had that much fun in a long time.

The band looked like they

were having fun. Although the audience played a big part of the evening, the fact that after so many years this band can still get genuinely excited about performing is a testament to their appeal as a live act. After all, how many guys fast approaching middle age (like Vince Ditrich the drummer) would hike their extra-stretchy

shorts up past their chest and do a solid-gold dancer impression in front of a bunch of college kids? Ditrich must have spent hours getting those shorts out of his ass.

I think I can sum up the band's current attitude with a story that John Mann told the crowd. He said his wife had told him that day about his son's first experience at skating lessons after a summer of rollerblading. Apparently, the four year-old went to his first lesson of level one and by skating from one end of the rink to the other, he immediately advanced to level six. On the way over to Mann's wife, the boy said, "Where's my stick, Mommy, where's my stick?"

At this point, Mann beamed with parental pride and said, "Isn't that so fucking Canadian?" before screeching his guitar into the powerful "Five Free Minutes." A great segue and a very satisfying performance.

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