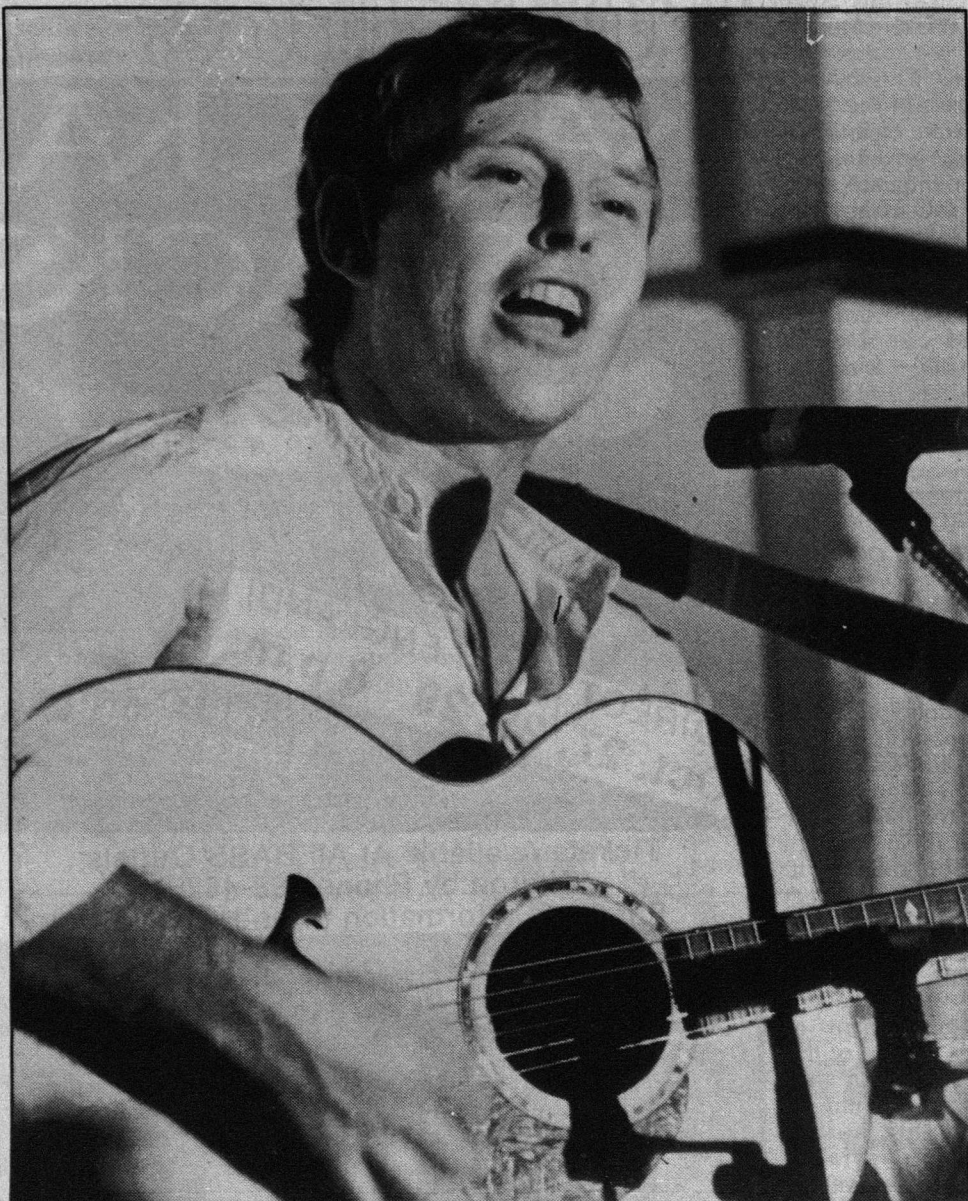


ARTS

Folk Club presents a bit o' the Irish charm



Robin Williamson delighting Orance Hall crowd.

Robin Williamson
South Side Folk Club
October 22

Review by Christine Koch

With twinkling eye, dimpled cheek, and impish grin, Robin Williamson might have been taken for pixie, elf, or one of the mythological figures about whom he sometimes sings, as he delivered his single solo performance at the South Side Folk Club Saturday evening. In the relaxed ambience of the Orange Hall, this charismatic folk performer enchanted the audience with his music and lyrics, immersed us in Celtic lore, and left us awed and delighted at the immensity of his artistry and wit.

Accompanying himself in turn on the folk harp, Scottish border pipes, and acoustic guitar, Williamson's performance was a mixture of the traditional and original. Several of his numbers concerned his Scottish heritage. The border ballad "Binnorie" was very finely done with feeling and melancholy, and full audience participation in the chorus. Many of his own compositions treat issues of a more social nature. "Me and the Mad Girl," about a lad trying to find and assert his own identity in a world of imposed values, and "The Poacher's Song," a humorous piece also about bucking the system, were vintage Williamson numbers.

With experience in the theatre, Williamson is a superb entertainer and a *raconteur par excellence*. Incorporating much gesture and facial expression in his performance, he established immediate rapport with the audience, and kept us roaring with laughter at his narratives and finely-edged, sometimes satiric or ribald, humour.

photo Bill Inglee

Robin Williamson is a poet in his own right. Drawing from a wealth of lore and literature, history and myth, his poems are generally narrative, often imagistic, always powerful. In diction and style they are noticeably reminiscent of his Celtic forebears, particularly Gerard Manley Hopkins, William Butler Yeats, James Joyce (Williamson's culture embraces the whole of the British Isles). In his final piece, "Five Denials on Merlin's Grace," a long recitative accompanied by harp, he describes his own heritage as poet and Scot. This work is a defense of poetry, a celebration of words, language, and communication, and of the tradition of which they are the prime ingredient. This piece alone establishes Williamson as a true bard in the Celtic tradition.

The warm-up act must not go unmentioned. Indeed, an entire concert from Ian Robb would also have been delightful. Also a Britain steeped in his culture — originally from London, England, but now hailing from Ottawa — Robb performed several traditional songs, including two improvised hornpipes, accompanying himself on the melodian. From his own repertoire, he sang songs of social or satiric thrust. "The Iron Lady," a tongue-in-cheek, bitter look at the Falklands War, a song about transportation to Australia, a song of *marriages de convenance* including a hilarious burlesque of the royal wedding of Charles and Diana — these and others were delivered with spirit and fine, lusty voice.

It was a wonderful evening, full of warmth and laughter. It is a pity these two very fine artists couldn't have played to a larger hall, although a less intimate atmosphere would have detracted from the performance. Still, the booking of Williamson here was a *coup*, and one which will not be forgotten.

Hairdresser finds culture

Educating Rita
Jasper Cinema Oct. 28

Review by Janine McDade

In *My Fair Lady*, Christopher Plummer pulls flower-seller Audrey Hepburn out of the streets and into his arms through a crash course in culture. In *Educating Rita*, Columbia Pictures' latest release, Julie Walters places herself under the tutelage of Michael Caine with approximately the same results.

Despite its stale script, *Educating Rita* does make for a pleasant couple hours of entertainment. Walters is fresh and believable in her role of Rita, the brassy hairdresser who decides she wants more in her life than babies and sing-alongs in the corner pub.

Rita is teamed-up with Caine, a self-absorbed, disillusioned, alcoholic college professor, when she decides to take televised university courses at night. Professor Bryant is assigned as her reluctant tutor, but is eventually won over by her passion to learn.

Predictably, as Rita discovers the classics of English Literature, Bryant becomes a little less tired of academe and a lot more interested in the charming Rita.

What saves this movie from being an inane duplicate of *Pygmalion* is Walters' deft portrayal of a woman discovering choice.

Anyone who has ever faced the risk of change will appreciate the struggles of Rita as she bucks the convention of her socio-economic background and overcomes her own feelings of inadequacy. Unconfident, with a prickly arsenal of defenses, Rita manoeuvres her way past all the obstacles (such as her husband's total incomprehension of her dreams) and manages to become a confident, literate, intelligent woman able to choose her destiny.

Bryant's transformation from alcoholic to caring instructor is less complete — he remains a "geriatric hippy" who has forgotten his cause. Although Caine gained 30 pounds to play the role, his performance is merely adequate.

It is obvious that the screenplay was written with Walters in mind as she is the only vehicle by which the film will gain any claim to the term 'memorable'. Walters won two awards for her stage portrayal of Rita.

Produced and directed by Lewis Gilbert from a screen play by Willy Russell, *Educating Rita* opens at the Jasper Cinema on October 28.

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