

Spirited performance at Dal



o f the W e s t

by Tammy Rogers, John Shimeld
& Judy Reid

Last Friday night the McInnes room was packed, the audience was fired up and more than 1400 feet tapped, jumped and danced to music from one of the most entertaining and political bands in Canada. The band is Spirit of the West, and if you didn't see their performance, you missed a crowded, claustrophobic, intense and undoubtedly good time.

Uisce Beatha (pronounced 'Ishca Bah-ha), a Celtic rock band from Ontario opened for Spirit of the West. The band looked like they were enjoying themselves and in turn some of the audience showed off their highland dance steps while almost everyone else faked it. Uisce Beatha's lively music got the crowd moving and left more than a few people breathless at the end of their set. Fortunately for those who missed the concert, Uisce Beatha will be playing at the Double Deuce this Friday and Saturday to celebrate their new CD release.

The crowd displayed amazing physical endurance as Spirit of the West played to a re-energized audience and never let them rest for a moment. Judging by the audience's enthusiasm the concert was a suc-

cess. Geoff Kelly, who is one the principle song writers for the band along with John Mann, was surprised that almost all of their gigs have sold out. "We didn't expect that at all because we haven't put a record out."

The band which began as a Vancouver Celtic-folk trio in 1983 has grown to a five member group with six albums behind them. The band is now made up of Kelly on flute, guitar and bodhran (a Celtic drum), John Mann on lead vocals and guitar, Hugh McMillan on mandolin, guitar, and bass, Linda McRae on accordion and Vince Ditrich on drums.

toe-tapping to a mass frenzy

Their latest album, *Go Figure*, released in 1991 left many fans disappointed with SOTW as they appeared to have deserted their acoustic sound for something much more electric and hard edged. Although the band is doing an acoustic tour in response to mail they've received and the fans they've talked to, they've found that audiences are just as happy to hear their new material as their old. "We're

doing a lot of older songs but it seems the response is stronger when we play things like 'D for Democracy', 'Spot the Difference', 'Good-bye Grace'", said Kelly. "It's a strange thing to figure out."

To describe Friday night's audience as merely responsive is understated at best. The crowd's reaction ranged from energetic toe-tapping to a mass frenzy which erupted during the band's performance of "Home for a Rest". However, as suffocating and intense the Halifax audience may have been, Kelly said that Spirit of the West has recently played to even more unruly mobs.

"Tonight was great. It was more like slamming and sideways stuff, but Ottawa everyone was up in the air and flying around on top of people's heads and landing on these kids." Kelly continued to say that during a concert at McGill, four women passed out and had to be carried out.

"The last few gigs we've said 'Take it easy and respect the people around you' because it gets out of hand. It's very distracting for us to sit there playing seeing someone's hurt. You just want to say 'That's it we're not playing anymore.'"

Kelly said that their next album should be out by the middle of Sep-

tember with a tour following in October. In an earlier interview with the *Carleton Charlatan*, Kelly described the upcoming album as political, but on a more personal level. "There are songs about Pee Wee Herman, John's honeymoon in Venice, being in Germany a little too long and one about a shopping list we found on the ground in Toronto."

After Friday's show, Kelly confirmed that the next album will have an even heavier sound than *Go Figure*.

"Yeah, we're not about to backtrack at this point," said Kelly. "We're pretty excited about the change in sound but we're also aware of keeping in the original elements too."

Kelly said that there were many reasons for Spirit of the West changing their musical style, but cited the need to be revitalized and charged up as their main reasons. He added, "If tonight's any indication then we're doing alright."



jale: No, I don't think so at all. The local bands have been doing this for as long or for longer than Sloan, so I don't think people do this for money because there is no money in it. Sloan was just a crazy thing that happened and that was really great, but we know better, especially us. I think we're pretty realistic, we know that's not going to happen, or it might happen ha, but it's not something we're expecting to happen. We're not going to count on it and I don't think anybody is. I think people play music because they want to play music. I don't think it's the money, because that's definitely the wrong reason.

Gaz: How do you come together and write your songs?

jale: We tend to write them individually and then bring them and then we all sort of hack at them.

Gaz: Whole songs or just parts?

jale: Sometimes parts but usually the whole song. We bring it in and we each figure out parts.

Gaz: Does it sort of happen that you'll be playing something and then you'll go: Yeah! That's it! Or do you have to beat it in to shape?

jale: That sometimes, but usually we go away and we do it very much on our own and come back and it's like that we're plucking away sort of thing. It's sort of the way everybody writes songs, you sort of stumble on them and work them out on acoustic guitar. But generally we bring pretty much completed stuff in then we're just vicious to each other! It works well for us though.

Gaz: So you try to be critical and supportive of each other at the same time?

jale: (Jenny) Yeah we try to be, but critical doesn't go over very well! None of us support each other's criticism...

Gaz: Being published artists what does that mean from a suburban Haligonian to a being something else...

jale: You mean what happens when we sign?

it was near impossible so it was Aunt Betty, and we liked that name it was a good name. (Jenny) I liked it. (Alyson) So did I.

Gaz: (To Eve) Did you?

jale: (Eve) No.

Gaz: But you called your EP "Aunt Betty"?

jale: We had to decide on something for the pressings so it was that.

'fuck, it would be so cool to be a rock star'

Gaz: Becoming something that you weren't eight, nine months ago.

jale: I don't think it's going to change our lives that much, because the thing about this deal is that it doesn't involve a lot of money, but there is a change from saying, no I am not a musician to yes I am a musician. But it's probably something we would always have done anyway.

Gaz: So you have always wanted to do this?

jale: (Alyson) Individually, I think yes. (Jenny) I didn't think that I'd ever, but...

Gaz: You have been through a lot of name changes from Tag to Aunt Betty and so on, how did it all work out? Was it just name changes?

jale: Well, we lost a member early on but other than that it's been the same thing name changes. There was already two other bands named Tag, and it was like 'What! No way!' And we had to change our name and the four of us couldn't come up with it as

Gaz: Well you call yourselves after the initials of your first names right?

jale: Second. Does that spell - oh yeah Cool!

Gaz: Jenny, Alyson...

jale: Denise...

Gaz: Jade. Someone told me that...they're full of shit! Where did you come up with jale?

jale: It just came out of the blue.

Gaz: It's a good name.

jale: It is a great name. It's great because it doesn't mean anything.

Gaz: Do you think there's a glut of these meaningless one word named bands?

jale: No. How many are there?

Gaz: Curve, Ride, Cure, Pure, Blur, Wire, Sloan, and on...

jale: Those have meanings, Curve, Ride. Those aren't meaningless names. jale is meaningless. Screech is word, jale is not a word. Those are not saying that they all have meaning, jale has no meaning. (Eve) How

do you know that the band Lush has meaning? (Alyson) Well it does because it's a word. jale is not a word in the dictionary.

Gaz: Oh God! Next Question: What does Halifax mean to you?

jale: (Jenny) Halifax is my favourite place in the whole world, I wouldn't be anywhere else. (Eve) Barf.

Gaz: So we have Barf and Divinity.

jale: Hopefully with this deal we don't have to go to Montreal or Toronto and that's something that we were talking about the money that's going, and we don't think that's as important as the attention that it brought us here. It does mean that we don't have to leave, hopefully. Maybe it was a one time thing, but that would be cool.

Gaz: How are the relations here between the bands here? You seem tighter than those in Seattle, is that contributing at all?

jale: (Alyson) You have no choice it's so small here, you have to get along. (Jenny) But it's fantastic that our support group is everyone who plays and all our friends and I think that cultivates a scene and that we're friends and we all do the same things—that's a community.

Gaz: Do you think there is a difference between the perception and the reality of being a band.

jale: Oh yeah. (Eve) I think there is. Being in a band, people always want to be a rock star and I think everyone or near everyone at some point says 'fuck it would be so cool to be a rock star'. Like there's this whole fantasy scene about what it's about. It's a whole lot of hard work. I mean it's really fun, but it's not what it looks like from an audience. (Alyson) I think we have been really lucky because I hear of other people who play or have been playing for years and have been in so many different bands and just not getting along and it just not ever happening for them. It seems like we've just been really lucky. Everything's been going so well, too fast for us to keep up with, and that we're all kind of at the same stage and it works out really well.

Gaz: If it wasn't so happy do you think that you wouldn't be doing it?

jale: NO WAY!

jale will be playing in tandem with Bubaikull at the Double Deuce this Friday, Feb. 26 and Saturday, Feb. 27



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429-7974

5426 PORTLAND PLACE, HALIFAX