

ENTERTAINMENT

The Great Celtic Invasion of '96

by Murray Thorpe
Brunswickan Entertainment

"Tell the story - turn the page
Feel the drummer coming near
Forever dancin' through the years."

These are lines taken from the first song, 'Forever Dancing', off of the newest album, *Living River*, of Rawlins Cross who told their stories in the SUB Cafeteria last Friday night. The turnout was small but those who were there were treated to a danceable brand of East Coast Music. The music is similar to contemporary rock, however, the sounds of accordion, bagpipes, mandolin and bodhran give it an Atlantic Canadian sound.

Living River was released last week and Rawlins Cross have just finished attending release parties in St. John's, Halifax, Ottawa and Toronto. This is their fourth album since 1989. The band originally started as a trio under the name of Open Road with Dave Panting, Geoff Panting and Ian McKinnon. Dave and Geoff first met Ian at a house party for Rita MacNeil. Since that time, the band has grown to six members from Newfoundland, PEI and Nova Scotia.

Rawlins Cross took their name from an intersection in St. John's called Rawlin's Cross. This intersection is near Bannerman park and has seven streets converging into that area. The name Open Road, however, is not forgotten as this is track number seven on *Living River*. The song speaks of not letting oneself dream one's life away by staying in one place, but of seeking out freedom by hitting the open road.

Both Geoff Panting and Joey Kitson don't mind their open road having nightly concerts because playing music is what they like doing. Back stage after the concert, Joey Kitson was proudly showing the picture of his newborn daughter; so in spite of all the romanticism associated with the open road, I suspect Joey likes to get back to Charlottetown as much as their schedule allows.

The band now plans to return to their homes in their respective provinces.



Hear, hear the pipes are calling (but nobody's listening...)

Photo by Warren Watson

They will be starting on an extensive Maritime tour in May but the tour dates have not yet been announced. The tour will head westward to Ontario and beyond all the way to Victoria in the fall. Until then, Rawlins Cross gig on their own. They will get together a couple of days before touring to make sure their first show goes smoothly. Geoff Panting, realizing that this arrangement is best when the band members do not live in the same city, said, "you get stale working with the same people all the time. It's nice to have a break to do something different - garner some new ideas and then bring them back to the band."

The biggest concert for Rawlins Cross so far was at the G-7 summit in Halifax in June, 1995. They have also opened to sold-out shows of The Pogues in Toronto and Montreal. They have been on *Rita & Friends* and they have played at The Rebecca Cohn, which is Nova Scotia's premier concert venue. During Friday's concert, Rawlins Cross talked about their recent appearance on *The Dini Petty Show*. They also claimed that she showed them a Rawlins Cross tattoo across her chest. They believe they will be back in Fredericton. Until then, they will be turning pages and hitting the open road.

by Mary Rogal-Black
Brunswickan Entertainment

Before The Rankin Family, Ashley MacLissac, and The Barra McNeils hit regular rotation on MuchMusic, the Cape Breton music scene was set in kitchen parties, ceilidhs, and the yearly Big Pond Concert.

The Barra McNeils used to play the Big Pond Concert. The show is held in a farmer's field by the shores of the Bras D'or Lake. The audience is a crowd of Capers, old and young, families, and some people from away who can't stop coming back to the island. Most of them have driven for hours in a yearly pilgrimage to this down-home variety show. They've come to hear Rita, see the dancers and meet friends and relatives. Sometimes you'll see young children doing the Highland Fling in the aisles.

The crowd at the Playhouse is a bit different. Instead of lawn chairs and picnic blankets spread out on the grass, they've got cushioned seats with limited elbow and leg room. Instead of natural lighting (or natural drizzle, on some occasions), there are stage lights. And, while I've only been to a couple of shows there, I feel confident suggesting that you'll very rarely see people jumping up to do a step in the aisles of the Playhouse.

It's not that it isn't a great venue. It's just that when you go there to see a group like The Barra McNeils, there's something just not right about the whole affair.

You get a feeling from the opening song that you're about to be drawn into one of those really satisfying kitchen parties, at least in terms of music. It's a fiddle tune, alternately evocative and rollicking, and looking around you'll see some heads nodding and a few feet stretched out into the aisles, happily tapping. Lucy's appeared and then disappeared offstage with her fiddle, but her brothers are playing and looking relaxed.

Gradually though, as the set goes on, you begin to sense some tension between the audience and the musicians. The crowd is appreciative, but let's face it, they're hardly demonstrative. Maybe it's the atmosphere, or the seating

arrangements, or all the city folk...regardless, there's not a lot of interaction between the audience and the band, and The Barra McNeils seem to have a problem with this.

It's not that the audience didn't appreciate what they're doing. These are talented musicians with an interesting range. Their material sometimes leaves something to be desired, with a lot of songs involving unhealthy, slightly obsessive relationship themes such as in their cover version of 'Darling Be Home Soon', where the singer just can't "wait another minute" to see her partner. It's a pretty song, for sure, but don't you just want to say: 'C'mon, get a life?' And I sometimes wonder why performers like The Barra McNeils and The Rankin Family feel the need to do a couple of twangy country songs, when what they really do well is Celtic traditional, folk, and rock.

In any case, as the concert goes on, it just becomes more and more embarrassing. Stuart begins behaving like he's leading a pep rally at an elementary school. Attempts to get the crowd to sing along fail miserably. And somehow even the lighting becomes complicit. It gets brasher, so that the kitchen party atmosphere established by the music is spoiled by the pink, purple and orange lights flashing in your face.

This is just one of the symptoms of a slightly cheesy, overproduced show. The other is that The Barra McNeils' rendition of 'The Ballad of Lucy Jordan' is so peppy that the actual ballad effect is long gone by the time they're finished with it. The pop style of music used for the song works against its poignant lyrics, making for a slightly uncomfortable ride. In contrast, 'Caledonia' is done with few instruments accompanying Lucy's absolutely beautiful vocals, and the effect is perfect. Sometimes less is more.

There is this sense that The Barra McNeils are just trying too hard. Maybe somebody needs to tell them to relax and enjoy themselves. When you're away from home, the audience doesn't have to be clapping along or dancing in the aisles to be having a good time.

Meanwhile, at Onstage...

by Murray Thorpe
Brunswickan Entertainment

The *Onstage* program for last Saturday was an evening with Minnie's Friends. This was evening of Newfoundland entertainment at its best. The troupe of Christina Smith, Jim Payne, Fergus O'Byrne and Glenn Downey performed various Newfoundland and traditional Irish songs which were mixed with comedy sketches and skits. Minnie White, who turns 80 this April Fools' Day, was unable to attend because of thyroid problems but her spirit was still present.

Christina Smith is a fiddler and a

cellist, and has recently released her first solo album, *Fiddle Me This*. Backstage, Christina explained to me that the fiddle and the violin were essentially the same instrument. Where the bow is held, the angle of the fiddle and the type of music played are the main differences. Tonight, it was the fiddle.

Jim Payne and Glenn Downey are mainly responsible for the on-stage comedy. Jim also plays the guitar, button accordion and the flute. Glenn is one half of the comedy duo, Sods 'n Rhymes and he plays the comical looking yet highly functional "ugly stick." This stick is used for percussion and is an oar stuck into a

shoe with a tomato juice can at the top. The rest of the oar is covered with beer caps free to slide on nails. It may be called ugly but when Glenn plays it, the sound is not.

Fergus O'Byrne was last in Fredericton with Ryan's Fancy. They put on two shows at Kings Landing over ten years ago. He plays the bodhran, concertina and the banjo. The bodhran is a goatskin covered drum, while the concertina is a smaller button accordion. Jim joked that the only difference between a concertina and a button accordion was that the button accordion would take longer to burn. Jim further said that the only difference between an

onion and an accordion was that people cried when an onion was cut.

During the evening, the group had the audience singing and clapping along at various times. The audience recited the chorus to a Rufus Guinard song about Uncle Manual milking the cow because "Aunt Kate, she's sick in bed." The members of the band do their own thing after this evening. According to Christine and Fergus, living in St. John's, they get to know the other Newfoundland musicians and quite often get together for collaborative efforts. This evening was just another example of a collaborative effort after which they are returning to Newfoundland.

COMPETITION TIME!

Just a baby competition this week, but tune in next week for the biggest contest of all time in The Brunswickan - everybody wins!!! This week though, we have a copy of Kim Stockwood's album *Bonavista* to give away. And all you have to do is answer the following question: **Where in Canada does Kim come from?**

Get your entries in by Tuesday midnight, and the first out o' the hat wins!

Oh - see over the page for The Beatles Contest results...