

Arts & Entertainment

Yoakam show record-perfect

Dwight Yoakam
Northlands Agricom
Saturday, November 26

review by Randal Smathers

The rumours are true — Elvis' hips are alive and well, and living in Dwight Yoakam's pants.

Saturday night at the Agricom, on a stage decorated with only six white plywood cacti, and with a band that pretty much just stood around and played, Yoakam's hip-twisting antics were the only thing to look at. Judging by the near-orgasmic screaming and squirming of the females near us in the audience, there were few complaints.

Yoakam enhanced the effect by wearing a pair of vacuum-fitted leather pants that started near his hips and ended with stirrups under his boots to make sure they stayed real tight.

Unfortunately, there wasn't a lot of interest to listen to for fans familiar with Yoakam's records. He seemed intent on getting in as many songs as possible from all three of his albums, and he stuck almost exclusively to exact duplicates of the album mixes. Not surprisingly, the exceptions were the highlights of the show.

One of these was "Walking After Midnight," a venerable tune which most contemporary listeners will probably recognise from the *Sweet Dreams* soundtrack. This gave a chance for Yoakam and chief sideman Pete Anderson a chance to strangle

some guitar strings at each other.

Anderson, who produced all of Yoakam's albums and plays electric six-string, and Yoakam on acoustic guitar, are the definite leaders of a nice, tight five-man band. Use of a fiddle instead of the god-awful electric organ which dominates so much country music was much appreciated. It also seems to be one of the main reasons Yoakam is considered to be a throwback to more traditional country music.

Yoakam didn't work very hard at communicating with the audience most of the night, interspersing a string of album hits — "Honky Tonk Man," "Buenos Noches From a Small Room," "Readin', Rightin'," "Route 23," and so on — with pithy comments like "Thank y'all fer yer s'port," and "This un's off th' last album."

The audience got up on cue for the last number, an extended cover of Elvis Presley's "Little Sister," complete with Yoakam's best guitar-humping gyrations from up on a speaker stack.

The encore featured Yoakam actually joking with the audience, which made me wonder why he had been so taciturn most of the night, and the best song of the show. Yoakam opened the encore by himself, singing and picking a truly fine version of "Johnson's Love" that had the audience screaming and cheering at every pause. It's just unfortunate that Yoakam waited so long in the show to give himself a chance to really shine, because he was more than up to carrying the night alone.

Deceivers just plain bad

The Deceivers ★
Famous Players Westmount

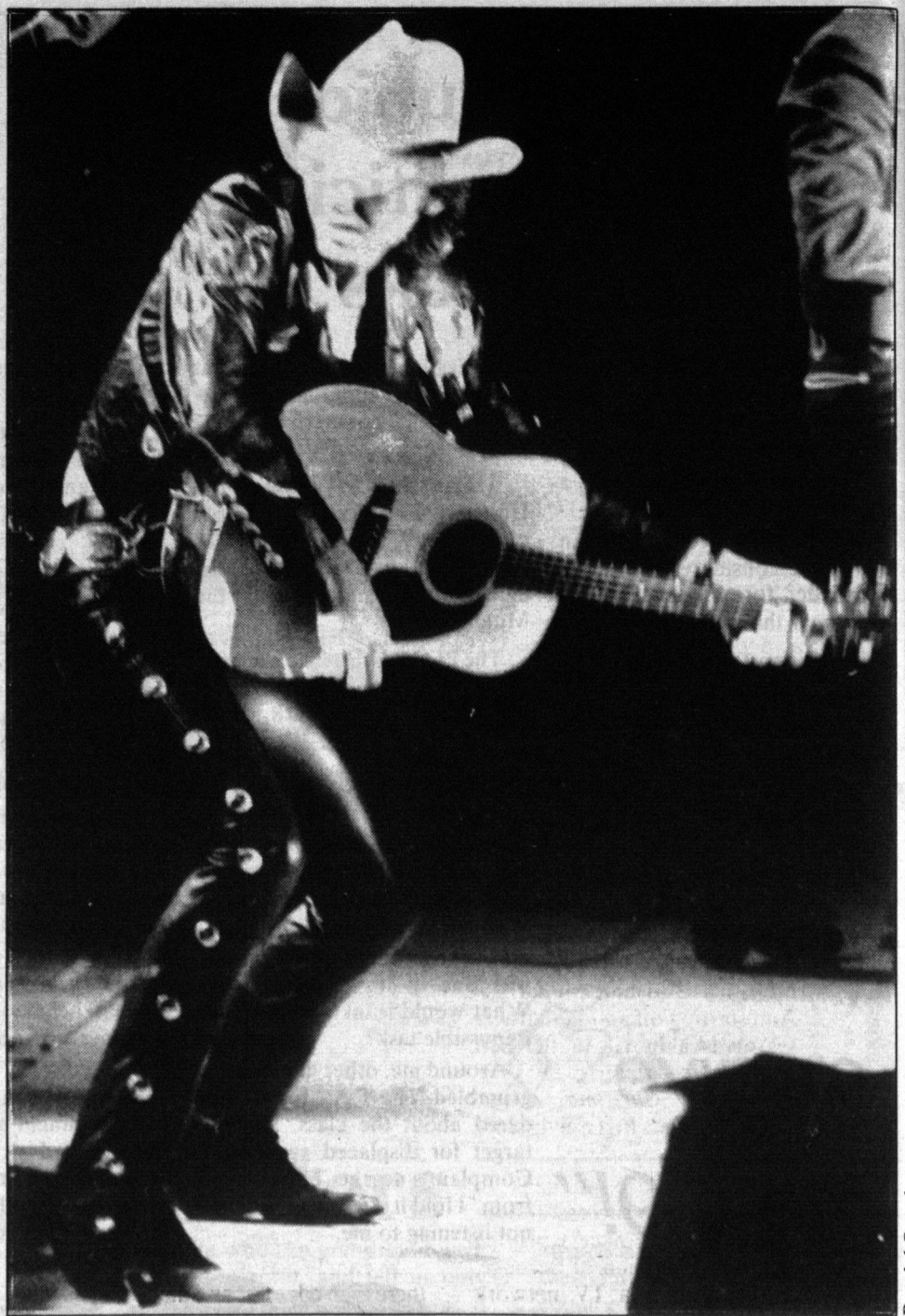
review by Brad Howard

The *Deceivers* is a film that strives for some admirable goals but falls much too short to even be considered a serious effort. Many faults plague this potentially great movie, which is based on fact, about a high ranking British officer William Savage (played by Pierce Brosnan of Remington Steele fame) in India in 1825.

Savage accidentally discovers, and attempts to expose, a religious cult calling themselves The Deceivers that preys on and murders innocent travellers. He maliciously uses his power to try to hunt them down until he is stopped by his superiors for using undue force. He then leaves his new

bride in order to infiltrate the cult with the help of a cult traitor whom Savage had threatened with death and promised the mercy of God to convince him. But Savage soon finds himself in a losing struggle not to adopt the mentality of the cult. The traitor sees what is happening and sneaks away to get help for Savage from the British forces, with the help of Savage's wife. When the traitor is caught on his way back by a cult spy, Savage is exposed and must decide if he has become a member of the cult (although by this point the choice is predictable and one really couldn't care less either way).

There are many angles to the story that were only touched on and not followed through which could have greatly added to the overall story. The lust of Savage's friend and fellow officer for Savage's devoted wife and the cultural interactions



Dwight Yoakam strikes a pose for fans of both kinds of music (that's country and western, for all you city slickers) at the Agricom Saturday night.

of the Indians and the English come to mind but neither topic is dealt with in depth.

The direction is so melodramatic that one is constantly reminded that one is simply watching a movie. For instance the audience is not really allowed to become enveloped in Savage's struggle with himself. The symbolism is so blatant at times, one must assume that any subtle symbolism is actually lucky coincidence.

Pierce Brosnan has obvious difficulty with the character of Savage. In the beginning, he is such an unbelievable renaissance hero that when he suddenly becomes a

sadistically obsessed man, at no point do we come to sympathize with him or his dilemma.

Savage is just the first example of the inconsistencies of character that extend to just about everyone in the film with the exception of the cliched character of his devoted wife.

The film does offer some wonderful scenes of the expanse and ancient beauty of India but these alone don't save the film. The ending holds some slightly satisfying surprises but it is simply far too late; one feels too disappointed and cheated by the lost potential of the film to care.

Junkies barely drown out Plant crowd

Cowboy Junkies
Power Plant
Friday, November 25

review by Ron Kuipers

The Cowboy Junkies entertained a jam-packed Power Plant Friday night, bringing with them their unique blend of roots and soft blues. The standing room only crowd attested to the growing popularity across Canada that this group from Toronto enjoys. Yet, curiously enough, many who were present seemed disinterested in a band they paid to see.

It was what you could call a relaxing show. The Cowboy Junkies are extremely mellow and laid back. Odd then, that they were playing in a bar, since they just don't feel like a bar band. The soft wave of their music seemed to clash with the din of audience conversation. Perhaps a theatre would have been a more suitable venue for them; that way, people who came to listen to them could do so without distraction.

Not only did the band seem displaced, but the concert also lacked the strong

visual element needed for a live show. After all, people go to concerts to see a band, not just hear one. The venue should perhaps share some of the blame. Seven or eight musicians with all their gear and instruments packed onto the miniscule Power Plant stage does not allow for much movement or creativity on stage. Yet it is also the Junkies style of music. Obviously, they are seasoned, accomplished musicians. But their slow, tuneful melodies just don't pack much live punch.

However, it is doubtful that the lack of visual stimuli bothered any Junkie fans. They came to the Plant to listen to one of their favourite acts, and to their credit the Junkies seemed to know this about their audience. In fact, the moment lead singer Margo Timmons began to sing she showed herself capable of holding an audience in her clutch. There is something mesmerizing and spellbinding about her voice as it softly floats through the air and then disappears. Too often, however, her voice would softly float through the air until it was rudely submersed by audience chatter — not to be confused with audience response.

Besides playing some of their own material from their two LPs, the Junkies performed some notable covers. The song "Blue Moon," especially, suited this band. One could just see a 1940's version of Margo Timmons hypnotizing an audience with a big band playing behind her. They also covered the Velvet Underground's "Sweet Jane" (their vinyl version has been defined by Reed himself as the definitive "Sweet Jane" cover).

Overall, the Junkies played with a quiet intensity. Each musician seemed to be in his/her own sphere, yet it all came together in the delivery. This soft determination gives the band the ability to clutch an audience, but immersed in the barroom din, and playing before a not wholeheartedly attentive audience, the Junkies seemed to lose some of their captivating edge. In the final analysis, this concert would have been easier to enjoy if the audience had also had a singularity of purpose — to actually listen to the band. And obviously, the only people who did this were Cowboy Junkie fans. In the end, this concert was only for Cowboy Junkie junkies.



Margo Timmons of Cowboy Junkies at the Power Plant. The band does the world's best version of "Sweet Jane."

Ron Kuipers

Randal Smathers