

# Ladies Choice a good choice for bluegrass



Redmond/hal Photo

2/5 of a choice bluegrass band, Gordon Stobbe, Trish York, at Ginger's.

by M.L. Hendry

Anybody who has ever known the sheer joy of dancing a jig at a down-home fiddle stomp will probably agree with me that most rock'n'roll is nine parts noise, one part boring.

Harmony is where it's at, says I. And harmony, as I discovered last week, is alive and well in Halifax and living in the **Ladies Choice Bluegrass Band**.

Propelled downtown with a desire to find music that wouldn't blow me under the table, my companion and I found ourselves at Ginger's on Hollis Street, and that's where I had my brief encounter of the right kind with five people who call themselves the Ladies Choice.

When I go to a bar, I don't usually expect to enjoy the music. So it is maybe an understatement to say I was delighted with the Ladies Choice Bluegrass Band.

Skip Holmes picks a mean 5-string banjo. Gordon Stobbe and Trish York both know how to make a fiddle dance and pick a mandolin - no mean accomplishment. Funny thing about fiddles, if they're played right they can set your senses to singing. Played wrong they can make even the most tone-deaf listener cringe.

No cause to cringe when **Ladies Choice** gets rolling. Walter Jakeman plays stand-up bass and

makes that venerable instrument sound great.

Bill Doucette pitches in on guitar, and you have all the makings of some good-time foot-stomping bluegrass jamming.

We heard some fine traditional tunes, including 'Blue Moon of Kentucky', 'Foggy Mountain Breakdown', and (the indispensable) 'Soldier's Joy'.

Holmes on banjo, Stobbe on mandolin and Jakeman - who left his usual position at the back of the stage to bring his bass into the limelight - worked together on a rollicking rendition of Jessie McReynolds' 'Stoney Creek'. Great picking.

'Florida Blues' gave Holmes and Stobbe a chance to show their slow skills on the banjo and fiddle.

Bluegrass is good for the spirit and good for what ails you. The music never drowns you out, no matter how frenetic the pace. Just picks you up and pulls you along.

Bluegrass is what **Ladies Choice** is all about. And where the group really shines is with their vocals.

York gave one good reason not to quit when she sang 'I Give Up', an original Ladies Choice tune. Doucette has a soft and gentle voice that he puts to good use in

'Dixieland & Me' and (yes, even the Carter Family) 'Keep on the Sunny Side'.

And when they all join in together - that five voices can blend so perfectly and sound so sweet!

Whether the vehicle is the Stanley Brothers' 'Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone', or the gospel 'Just A Little Talk With Jesus', this group can harmonize. It's enough to melt the stoniest heart, and spoil you for noise and nonsense forever.

My favourite was 'Jordan', first done by the Stanley Brothers, and later by Emmylou Harris.

I could listen to this group perform such songs for a much longer time than Ginger's early closing hour permits.

**Ladies Choice Bluegrass Band** has put out two albums, **First Choice**, and **Bluegrass Is Our Business**, both on Boot Label of Ontario. (Rumour has it that "Bluegrass" has just gone cast-iron in Alberta...)

While Stobbe's jokes sometimes fall flat, those voices never do.

**Ladies Choice** will be back at Ginger's the first week in March, just in time to celebrate their fourth anniversary.

Check it out.

# Iggy pop - the world's forgotten boy

by Michael Brennan

Iggy Pop's new album **Party** has now been out for at least a couple of months, but at first I was reluctant to pick it up. With his return to performing in the late 1970's, Iggy Pop seemed washed up. His albums sounded tired and forced, lacking in that maniacal sexual energy that made his first three records with the Stooges in the early '70's so great. Since I treasured the Stooges so much, I didn't want to hear a watered-down, useless Iggy Pop - another burned-out king. (Iggy Pop really is the second king of rock and roll.) However, I only half believed the demeaning statements, and after buying his new album **Party**, took great pleasure in a strong, still passionate and uncompromising Iggy Pop. Although the music isn't as refreshing as many of the newer groups today and is in some ways flawed, there is a much greater maturity and sincerity in this album than one would find with most of the newer bands, certainly far more life and meaning than all of the aging supergroups. There's a real drive to this music, a compassion and honesty that makes it relevant and timeless rock and roll.

Of course, **Party** is not nearly

half as good as Iggy's first work, but one cannot expect it to be. **The Stooges**, **Fanhouse** and **Raw Power** (all done with the Stooges) are absolute masterpieces of rock and roll. Throbbing, distorted, loud and sensual, with Iggy's voice screaming with innocent lust, these records teem with sex, energy, passion and pure desire. "I Wanna Be Your Dog", "No Fun", "Loose", "Penetration" and "Shake Appeal" are songs as powerful as anything done in the history of rock and roll, even when including Elvis, Jerry Lee, Little Richard, Lou Reed, the Ramones, the Clash and the Sex Pistols, among others. I simply have to recommend these first three albums. If you don't have them, don't waste any time in getting them.

**Party** has a power of its own. The opening cut has a heavy, sensual beat in the tradition of the Stooges, the playing is gutsy and tight. Iggy's singing enters wonderfully, not overdone or blatantly silly, obvious in his treatment of the words. He reels off a great line that sums up perfectly what Iggy Pop is all about: "Just gimme some pleasure/yeah it's my life." "Pleasure" is easily the best song on the album. The rest of side one continues with solid

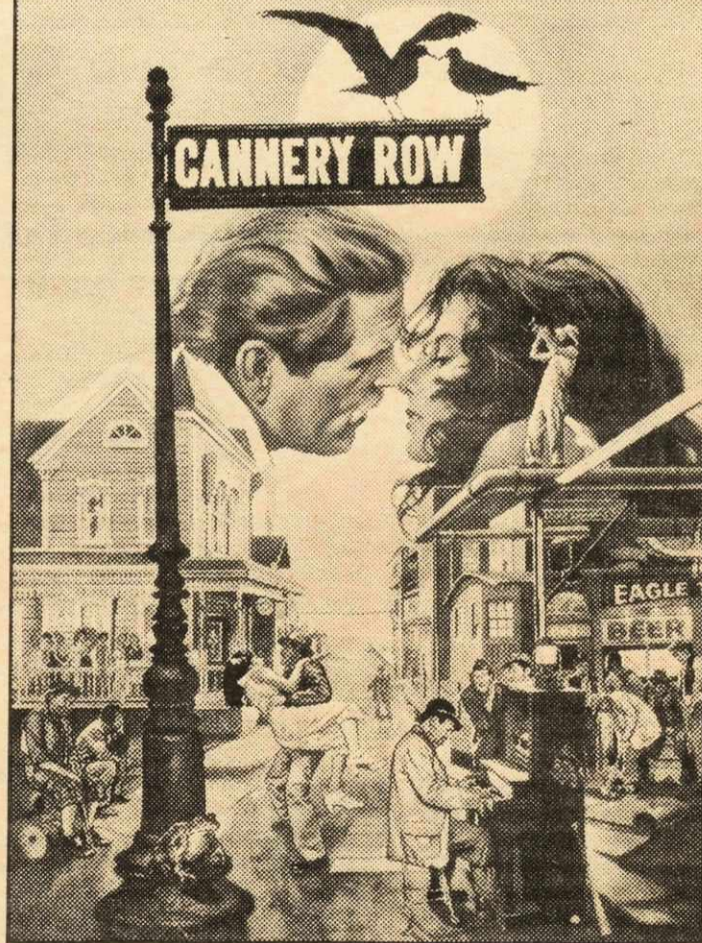
rock songs. "Rock and Roll Party" is a happy exclamation of the dingy, low-life roots of rock - the sleazy bars where it all comes from. Then in "Eggs on Plate", Iggy is staring at his walls in neurotic frenzy wondering what the hell he's doing there. And more that just ecstatic frenzy. "Sincerity" is a very nice number about how good it is to have friends. Iggy sings it with a strong compassion and sober honesty that few performers can muster.

Side two, unfortunately, is weaker and only "Pumpin' for Jill", another simple song about the strength of a relationship, does anything for me. The remaining songs are forgettable, with singing that is often meaningless and put on.

Still, there is a wonderful feel to **Party** and no matter what its plans, it has a strong, staying value. It does not match the old power of the Stooges, but is certainly worth attention and deserves more acclaim than any other album from surviving bands before or from the early seventies, not to mention any comparison with contemporary groups. The world's forgotten boy, as Iggy Pop has called himself, may be fucked up, cut up or screwed up, but he's certainly not washed up.

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