

River Band outweighs Yarbrough

by Bruce M. Lantz

I prepared for the Glenn Yarbrough concert at Dalhousie's Rebecca Cohn auditorium by having a couple of draft at the Pic. The small crowd there and the walk to Dal in the steady drizzle weren't enough to destroy the slight bias I had for Yarbrough; I'd been told he was good and expected him to be so.

The auditorium added to my expectations. It's impressive the first time around. My seat was perfect — first row centre, balcony. The lights were on, the stage was lit with an orange spear flanked by mauve, there were lots of dark wood, and a five-man band was tuning up. They got ready and Yarbrough walked on stage (much heavier than I'd expected) and sang.

His voice was strong and controlled as he and the group, the Havenstock River Band, worked through a variety of numbers encompassing "Funky in the Country", several Rod

McKuen love ballads and "Put Your Hand in the Hand", a song which I personally detest for its presentation of abstract platitudes. But it was well performed.

Yarbrough is good and he's at home on stage; he should be after so many years performing all over the world. Yet with a duet entitled "Epistle", by Hoyt Axton, I realized that my attention was wandering from him and fastening on the River Band. They were very tight and stole the show throughout; a hell of a pleasant surprise.

I found myself watching them: The pianist (Geoffrey Pike) who all but played with his feet and did a fantastic job; the two guitarists (Gary Clontz and Archie Johnson) who interchanged lead work; the drummer (Jeff Warren) and the bassman (Gordon Curry).

These people had energy to burn, and when Yarbrough left the stage after half a dozen songs, they burned it. Where the

star was dead and dried up from too many years of the same sort of thing, the Havenstock River Band was alive and loving it. They performed six numbers, moving from funky/ country to solid rock and roll.

There were problems of course. The lighting was poorly handled in spots and the fine work being done was virtually impossible to hear due to sound problems. But people knew, they could tell that these people were good.

Though little mention of them was made in advance publicity (they've had problems with maintaining Yarbrough's star-image) you should know that they're presently cutting an album; it should be available in Canada in about five years. They're good artists and performers as well, especially if you consider that they've only been together for 11 months and starving for a lot of that time.

This concert taught me the difference between an artist and an entertainer. Yarbrough could never be anything but an entertainer. That was the way he began and made his way with the Limelighters, and it's impossible for him to lose it. His voice is good and strong, with a very distinctive tonal quality, but he lacks expression. No



matter how good his arrangements (and they are superlative) it comes out flat — as though he was bored with the whole thing. He doesn't have the life, the energy that shows an artist and separates him from an routine performer. Perhaps

that is why this was intended as a farewell world tour.

Yarbrough plays for the people in the audience, plays what he thinks they want to hear, rather than weaving them into a net of song and holding them with it. If you just play for the people then you are spread too thin and lose effect. He's no artist, but one of the best entertainers I've ever seen.

Although the Havenstock River Band was very good, they could not be called great artists — yet. They will be in short order. To date they have lost out because the audience is of the type that digs Yarbrough's sound. They are good, versatile musicians who like what they're doing. They're very together and if they stay that way we'll be hearing from them again.

After the concert I went back to the Pic for a few more. I thought about the old man and the young band, star and back-up, entertainer and artists. I was glad I went to the Glenn Yarbrough concert, but not very much because of him.

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