

Clannad are folks on the rise

Concert review by Gordon Turtle

Clannad is brilliant. Clannad is possibly the most versatile and accomplished folk band in recent history.

Planxty and Bothy Band, two Irish bands that have been the standard under which everyone has been measured, have met their match in Clannad. Performing in front of a drunk and misguided audience, this five member Irish group was dazzling and exciting, performing traditional and original folk material with a flourish and capability that Edmonton has not seen in a long time.

Using mostly material from its four albums, Clannad mixed it up well, alternating fluid ballads with taut instrumentation and rousing vocals. Unfortunately,

ly, this talented and much-in-demand group might reconsider returning to Edmonton, because its audience on Saturday night was not, shall we say, well-suited to the band's mood.

Clannad fans were literally facing the Lions. The concert was held in the Northgate Lions' Recreation Centre, which resembles a large community hall, and the concert definitely had that community hall wedding reception feel to it. A good mixture of young and old, drunk and sober, the audience seemed primed for Will Millar and the Irish Rovers, and not serious Irish folk music.

The show was opened by Gaberlunzie, a talented Scottish duo, who squander their talent trying to look like the John Travoltas of folk. Dressed in shiny leather pants and slick, open-neck shirts, the group rollicked its way through a number of interesting jigs and replied with some Scottish ballads. Entertaining between-song performers, Gaberlunzie's biggest problem is a seeming lack of sincerity: their idea of a folk concert seems to be drinking and guffawing their way through a set. The audience loved them, which says a lot.

Gaberlunzie was followed by a sweeping display of Irish folk-dancing. Little wood sprites and elfin fairies hopped and danced their way around a space in the center of the floor to the music of a solo accordion. I know this sounds like the wedding scene in *Goodbye Columbus*, but the kids were mighty good dancers, and their amusing routines seemed true to the traditional forms of Irish dancing.

But all of this pales to the music and presence of Clannad. The band is composed of Maire Ni Bhraonain (vocals, harp), Pol O Braonain (flute, tin whistles, guitar, vocal), Ciaran O Braonain (bass,

guitar, vocal) Padraig O Dugain (mandola, guitar, vocal) and his twin brother Noel (guitar, vocal). All of them are first-rate musicians who concentrate on each and every song as if their lives depended on it.

Maire Ni Bhraonain, the prime singer, stands out as a vocalist who rivals Cano's Rachel Paiement in strength and range. As well as providing a rare harp performance, her vocals were a highlight of the evening.

The band closed off their set with a long, largely instrumental, traditional tune which allowed each member of the group to improvise on his or her instrument. Much to the astonishment of the audience, who were impatiently waiting for "The Unicorn," Clannad began to create an intense, rocking rhythm that almost carried our table off in a rapture of ecstasy. Some highly innovative sound phasing swayed the listener's mind from left to right and up and down, as the song culminated with the harmonious repetition of the song's one-line chorus. What a moment for live music in Edmonton!

Co-sponsored by the Southside Folk Club, the Clannad concert was a rare opportunity to see one of the biggest traditional folk bands perform in Edmonton. They should have been in the Jubilee Auditorium however, for only a hall of that nature can do justice to a group that is rapidly becoming the biggest name in Irish folk.

Clannad has four albums, which are usually available in HUB Records. For anyone wishing to experience state-of-the-art Irish music, these albums are a must. Like Fairport Convention a decade ago, Clannad represents the vanguard of progressive folk music, and they will surely spawn a larger audience and a score of imitators. With the collapse of Planxty a few years ago, Irish folk has disintegrated into fringe groups whose records are becoming increasingly difficult to purchase in Western Canada because importers don't collect the megabucks they want from folk records.

Clannad could change all of that though. I'm sure that if Clannad returns, Edmonton music lovers will be lined up to see them: they are, simply, amongst the best in the world in their field, and Irish folk music is rich and diverse enough to challenge any musician.

The Southside Folk Club will continue its practice of bringing in top British acts next weekend when English folkie Martin Carthy appears in Edmonton. Possibly the most prodigious and best-known of the recent crop of traditional singers, Carthy is likely most famous for his work with Steeleye Span. Rumours are flying that Fairporter Dave Swarbrick will appear with Carthy, but I'll believe that when I see it.



photo Russ Sampson

Three elfin fairies dancing their way between the beer.



photo Russ Sampson

Maire Ni Bhraonain and her uncle Padraig O Dugain playing the beautiful Irish music of Clannad.



photo Russ Sampson

Clannad brings a little bit of Ireland to the city.

Dance company weaves imaginative web

Dance review by Megan Collins

The Brian Webb Dance Company gave an engrossing performance at SUB Theatre, on Thursday evening. The program consisted of five works, some daringly experimental, and each complemented by the bold musical inventions of composers Wendy Albrecht and Bob Myers.

The dramatic triumph of the evening was "Thamar and Amnon," a piece fraught with the tension of incest between brother and sister. The brother (Webb), with gyrating hips and leering face, mocks the feigned prudery of his sister (Graine Holman), whom he has surprised in reverie. Her fluttering hands extend the tension of her body which yearns and stretches toward sensual contact. When the contact comes, hesitantly at first and then with violence, to shatter her composure, the hands clutch and convulse in horror, and retreat as she draws into herself, shuddering. The dance is modulated by Albrecht's voice that slides from hum to shriek to quaver as the drama builds and breaks.

"Double Solo" is accompanied by the reading of a

passage from Proust. It portrays man before and after the over-refinement of Proust's world. Webb, as man exposed naked to the elements, begins by exploring the dimensions of his world; leaping and falling, erect or on all fours. When he hesitates, his hands quiver. They continued to quiver when, metamorphosized, he stands encased in taffeta and tails. Initially a "natural man," vital, aware and vibrant, he becomes fragile and somehow remote. He repeats the animal-like movements, but his flapping coat-tails reduce them to bizarre antics. ("Arms and legs have memories," the narrator reads from Proust. They continue to move in spite of the rigid apparel of sophistication.)

"Ennuui" is a delightful antithesis to the tension of these two works. Clad in flapping underwear, two men (Webb and Gordon Duchaine) exhaust themselves with the effort of being. Their slack bodies merge and collapse to the sound of running water. Compelled only by whim, they slide together and ooze apart. Albrecht's music, playful and outrageous, strays from, only to collide again with the dance.

The two group pieces, "The Garden" and "The Swimming Pool," are less effective because of their length. One expects some meandering in a pool-side fantasy, but the pace of the four water nymphs is too slow for the apparent agitation of the women imagining them. She takes so long to get used to the water that the audience has lost its sympathetic shivers long before she plunges in, rescuing herself and us from the vagaries of too much leisure.

"The Garden," Webb's latest work, describes the process of an exhausted runner's re-discovery of self. Three guardian angels, poured into mint green sheaths and trailing wisps of veil, entice him back to life. With growing fascination, he rediscovers motion and defines it by moving towards new individuality. Once back on his feet, he begins leaping with unabated zest, leaving the audience with the foreboding that the painful process is about to begin again.

Webb tries the patience of the audience at times, but the imagination and energy of each of these pieces does not allow it to stretch to the breaking point.