

New challenges for Spirit of the West

Spirit of the West

by Rod Campbell and Sherri Ritchie

Spirit of the West fans can look for a bit of a change when the popular Celtic folk group comes to Dinwoodie this Saturday. For one thing, there will only be three musicians on stage, as the lead guitarist J. Knutson left the band in August.

"It was sort of a mutual thing," said band member Geoffrey Kelly from his home in North Vancouver Wednesday. "We felt the band going in a different direction and we were having personality problems."

This has by no means hurt the group, who are soon to record their third album.

"We're not finding it a lot different and the comments we've got from most people were that they didn't really miss the extra guitar," said Kelly. "We certainly miss some of Jay's ability as a lead guitar player, but I think we're making up for that with Hugh's versatility. He's really filling in all kinds of little spots."

The new album is still in the planning stages, but Kelly says they hope to record in December and have it released by February. "I think what we'll probably do is record it and then just see what kind of interest we can get, shop around with the finished product," said Kelly.

They are still writing material, and they will perform a few of the new pieces this weekend. Kelly warned to look for a few changes in style. "There will be a strong political edge to the new stuff, a more global political slant," said Kelly.

Although many people have been pressuring them to put drums and keyboards behind them, they are not comfortable with the full band sound. "I can't see us becoming more commercial. At the moment we're quite content to be a three piece band," Kelly said. "Our progression will probably be on the lyrical side."

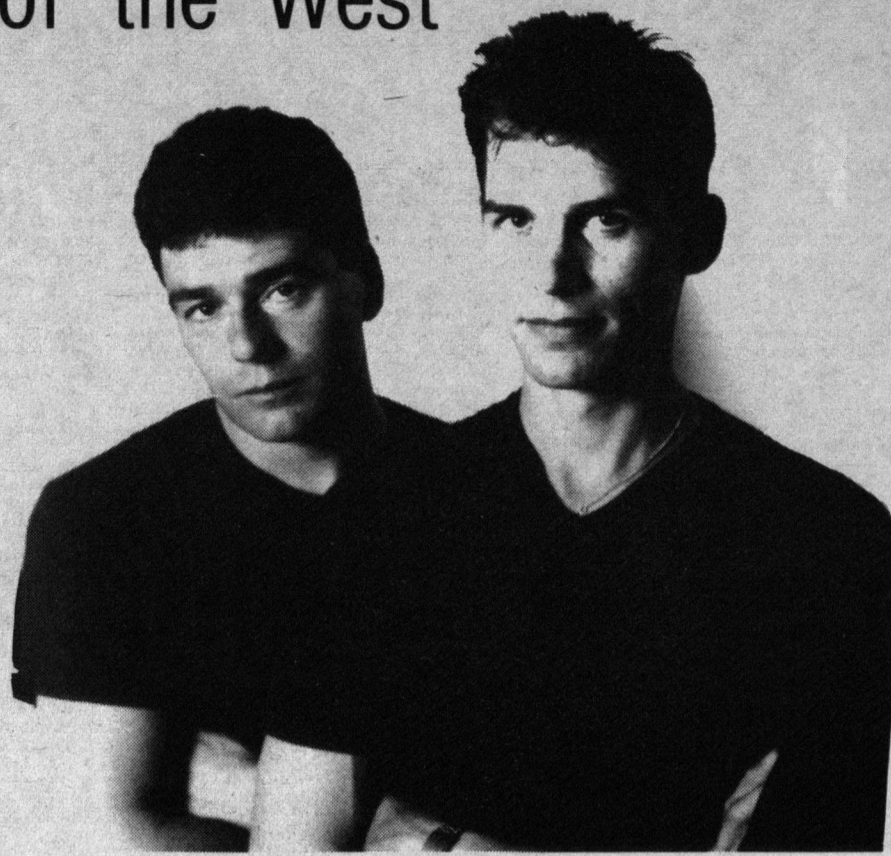
This new album will be the first album recorded with Hugh," Kelly continued, "so I think that alone will give it a real different sound, hopefully a real progressive sound."



Spirit of the West: "At the moment we're quite content to be a three-piece band."

Kelly also mentioned that the sound on the new album will have a much sharper edge. "We're going to try recording live in the studio, with as little overdubbing as possible," he explained. They want to capture the more intense energy of their live performances.

Despite their popularity, Spirit of the West has never received much commercial radio play. "That really doesn't concern us too much," Kelly said. "We are still selling a lot of albums, and there is a fair demand to have us booked across the country. If we could get a little more commercial radio airplay without giving in to that style of writing, that would be great. We are not going to try and write for that market."



Playing a cabaret may seem to be a strange step for a band so used to concert venues. Kelly seemed to agree. "I don't think we're a true dance band. In some ways, I don't really like being billed as a dance band; some of the stuff we do is pretty lyrical. I think if people come because we're there, it won't be as bad. If they're coming expecting a dance band, then I'd be a bit worried."

Between now and Christmas, Spirit of the West will be quite busy. They will be touring British Columbia and the prairies, with one stop down in Seattle. "We are going to try to do some University and College stuff in Quebec, to open up that market," said Kelly.

The next few months may hold an even more important break for the band. They

have been invited to tour Scotland with Run Rig, another Celtic group. "We got a call from them last week," said Kelly. "They haven't got any dates to give us, so they can't really confirm our gig over there. We would be thrilled to do it. The tour they're going to do will be really big venues, and a lot more numbers than we're used to."

Altogether, Spirit of the West seems to be a band brave enough to make changes and explore new styles, as well as expand their audience across the Atlantic. It is also to their credit that they are resisting the temptation to make their music more commercial. It should be interesting to see what the future holds for this Western Canadian band.



Comedian Neil Hedley: taking the plunge into the fall time comedy circuit.

Making people laugh is Hedley's purpose

interview by Darren O'Donnell

As the majority of University students head toward their second week of studies, most of the glamour has worn off. The excitement of registration and rioting is hardly enough to carry most of us beyond the first Monday. If, by chance, you too are

starting to experience the second week blahs, maybe it's time to get out and get into some comic relief.

Toronto-born comedian, Neil Hedley, performing Friday Sept. 18 and Saturday Sept. 19 at The Power Plant may be just the man to make you merry.

Hedley, only 20 years old, is a fresh, optimistic young man who had decided to take the plunge into the full-time comedy circuit. If the name is familiar it is not too surprising, since he has been a regular performer at Yuk Yuks in Edmonton and Calgary as well as at the Sidetrack Cafe.

As of September 30, Hedley's full-time position as a commercial writer for CISN radio terminates and he will be on his own.

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At this point he is going from day to day with the future only planned so far as later on this month, with a show at Grant McEwan.

His plans are to stay in Edmonton for the present. "It's safer in Edmonton," he says over two brownies and a carton of milk, "Edmonton audiences are great and in all of Alberta there are fifteen, maybe twenty, comedians that are any good. I'll develop here, then maybe go east." He paused for a moment. "Maybe."

In his humour, Hedley strives for the intelligent and thoughtful. He's not a big fan of coarse, sexual humour which he terms "dick jokes"; unfortunately, resorting to dick jokes is the only way to get to some audiences' cc's hearts. "I'm ripping the audience off if they're not laughing," Hedley observes, and a silent audience is not good for business. "You've got to eat . . . that's what it comes down to."

Commenting on the humour he prefers, Hedley cites George Carlin and Bill Cosby, both of whom are skilled practitioners of observational humour. "I like the stupid stuff that all people do; insights into the human condition." He believes that comics have the potential to get people to listen to what they are saying. Also, he prefers to stay away from humour that glorifies the destructive things that people do, such as drunk driving.

The biggest success Hedley has had with a routine was one night at Yuk Yuks when his

ordinarily successful Michael Bell-in-bed-with-his-wife routine had a surprise audience — Michael Bell himself. "He loved it," Hedley laughs. "He came up to me after and told me how much he enjoyed it."

But, as all performers know, for every brilliant bit that works wonderfully, there are always one or two moments that die. Hedley's worst moment onstage was during a joke suggesting that Jim Bakker could take on Willie de Wit and win. Unknown to Hedley, the boxer's father and brother had just been killed in a plane crash the previous day, and the audience reaction was less than friendly. "After that I just closed up shop," Hedley says shaking his head. "Once you've done something like that there's no way to get them back. I still won't do that de Wit line."

All in all, however, things seem to be going very well for Mr. Hedley. He is halfway through co-producing a pilot for a radio show entitled "Laughtracks", which will feature six to seven comedians a week performing five to ten minutes of their hottest material. He hopes to sell this pilot to a station in every major city across North America.

He seems to be content with comedy for the moment but doesn't disregard other possible professions in the performing arts. Acting is on his list of future projects. For instance, he is working on a serious, autobiographical play for next year's Fringe Festival which will deal with coming to terms with himself.

"There was not a lot of happiness handed around my home when I was going up," he comments thoughtfully. "People have so much to worry about and making people laugh is what I love doing." Hedley feels that his approach to comedy is unique in the business. "I'm not out there to pick on anybody, I'm not wanting to pick up the money. I just want to make people laugh."

It's this desire to hear the laughter of people that is pushing Hedley out the door and into the cold world of professional comedy. "Getting laughs is better than sex," Hedley observes, but can't resist the afterthought: "better than sex I've had, anyway."