

Walk the West breaks Smithereens

The Smithereens

Dinwoodie

review by Mac Hislop

On Friday night a moderate size crowd took in The Smithereens in the renovated, and now horridly gaudy, Dinwoodie's Cabaret.

Opening for The Smithereens was Tennessee's Walk the West, a band which brought to the smallish mass of post-pubescent a heavy dollop of downright harsh southern U.S. rock and roll. The band sounded like that obnoxious band ZZ Top might, if completely wired on those now "un-American" illicit powders.

Bashing about in cowboy boots and string ties, these down-home boys (reminiscent of those evil white dudes in the film *Southern*) put on one hell of a show. With three guitars blaring, a fiddle, drums, harmonica, and a token insignificant instrument in the form of a cow gong, Walk the West threw up a lunatic sound, the likes of which no one north of Nashville would

dare to emulate.

The five (definitely not your basic Bronski Beat, cutesy, pseudo-intellectual wimps) had no problem relating to the crowd and getting it moving. Poser chicks with Colgate sneers stalking poser dudes with fabutans bumped against token hard cores sporting fuck-you coiffures to the band's psychotic beat.

Walk the West's energy proved to be terribly inspiring for a rather absurd type with Nutcracker pretensions. Before the very amused if somewhat derisive crowd, he danced a flamboyant *pas de deux* with his indubitable ego. Sadly, aspirations of Ego were not realized by Body or Skill, thereby making the pompous grebe ridiculous. (I detected a certain similarity in his performance *propos* that of our very own PM.)

Walk the West did a fabulous job doing that which a warm-up band must — the band got things going. While its first two songs were intriguing, featuring an interest-

ing beat and a wild violin with gong accompaniment, the band settled into laying down a cliché, if very energetic, old southern U.S. rock and roll line. But though its music was overdone, the crowd was really into what Walk the West was about. Furthermore, the band was having great fun and obviously enjoyed playing the thrashing audience. (If you enjoy doing incidious things to hungover roommates or if you revile your neighbour and his choice of pets, check out the band's newly released self-titled album. You won't see it chez moi.)

After the five randy sods from the South exited stage, the charged up and eager crowd was left to wander about the sordid, terribly gauche, unspeakably clichéd and chintzy decor of the neo-Dinwoodie's for a very long time. Most had time to get pissed and hungover between sets.

Eventually, the Smithereens sauntered on stage, plugged in, turned on, and plunged into an abyss of loudness. The restrained

seething mass was engulfed by a wall of noise set down by brutal guitars. An emotionally inert Jim Babjek on guitar and barely breathing Dennis Diken on drums planted themselves at their stations, emanating all the energy and eagerness of postal workers. A somewhat lively Pat DiNizio on vocals and rhythm and a very energetic Mike Mesaros on bass took the cue from the band's mentors and helped lay down the very loud opening song. (I don't think Edmonton's Euthanasia is that loud.)

The crowd was not overly enthusiastic about the band, but enthusiastic enough to demand an encore. In retrospect, had The Smithereens just taken the scattered applause and retreated to their cheap hotel rooms, I would not be obliged to write the following. I could have noted in passing that they played an adequate gig, nothing great, but that it had its moments. I could have left off here extolling the vocal abilities of DiNizio and overall skill of the musicians and could have merely questioned the band members' prudence in opting to destroy their potentially neat sound by overpowering the crowd with watts. Noise and energy must not be confused as one and the same.

So, what about Friday night, all things considered? As you may have noted, I committed a reviewer's crime of some small importance; I devoted an inordinate amount of attention to the warm-up band, leaving the headline act cold. There is good reason for this. While I am not wild about southern U.S. rock and roll, nor Walk the West, the Tennessee band proved to be far more entertaining than their northern compatriots. They enjoyed the crowd's support and had lots of fun. While I think The Smithereens' album, *Especially For You*, is a remarkable album in its revivalist class, I was greatly disappointed in the band's stage sound, aloofness, and incapacity to play to the crowd. I was really pissed off with The Smithereens' choice of encore material. I have not written them off, they had better prove themselves worthy of support. That they did not do Friday night.

Edmonton symphony orchestra sparkles

Edmonton Symphony Orchestra
Jubilee Auditorium
November 6th, 7th

review by Juanita Spears

Finally some sparkle at the symphony! Those loyal concert-goers who braved Edmonton's first icy snowfall last Friday evening were treated to a vivacious evening of music.

While the bears are lumbering off to their winter slumber, the ESO has finally come alive and awakened from the musical snooze that they have been in so far this fall.

Leading the way was guest pianist Cecile Licad. Her performance of Saint-Saens' *Piano Concerto No. 2 in G minor* charmed the audience with forceful, yet delicate playing. The work opens with splashing arpeggios and thundering chords. Although Licad was perhaps too forceful,

causing the bass to sound muddled in the beginning, she won the audience over with her delicate touch during the quieter moments.

The puckish dancelike rondo, the middle movement, really drew the audience out of their seats as they responded to Licad's childish energy.

The presto finale, a breathless Tarantella, was taken at mindboggling speed. Envision feet flying at the vivacious tempo taken by Licad. The ESO was hard-pressed at times to keep up to the runaway energy of the petite soloist.

The audience loved her, calling her back four times to prove their adoration.

The rest of the program stood the test of comparison. Guest conductor Per Dreier seemed to draw new life from the ESO with his magic baton.

The concert's opening work, Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* overture (affectionately known to many as the *Battered Bride*), may not have been as tight as it should have

been; however, it never lost the boisterous energy essential to the work.

Sandwiched between the overture and the concerto was Quebec composer Clermont Pepin's *Le Rite du Soleil Noir*. Laced with strong syncopated rhythms and dissonant sonorities, the one-movement work conjured up violent 20th century images much in keeping with the title of the piece.

The second half of the concert featured Carl Nielsen's *Symphony No. 4, "The Inextinguishable"*. It was not fused with the same level of energy as those witnessed before intermission.

There were moments when the back half of the orchestra was trying to take the lead. However, Dreier ably regrouped them for the final Allegro in which stereo timpani sets end the work with a demonstrable boom.

Let's just hope Per Dreier forgot his magical wand on Uri Mayer's podium... Only time will tell.

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