

National Velvet Brings Down Roof

by Joe Savoie

To see is to believe. That is the only way I can describe Tuesday's performance by National Velvet at the College Hill Social Club. Since this is the only band I've wanted to see in my 2 1/2 years at UNB, I'm happy to report that I was not disappointed in the least.

Born of tension 4 1/2 years ago in Toronto, National Velvet has created a unique sound that defies categorization incorporating elements of heavy metal of the early 80's alternative scene, resulting in a 'thrashy', high powered, very danceable sound, comparable to The Cult.

The venue had its obvious limitations, but the band was able to work around them, reproducing their songs with seemingly little effort. While extremely tight, the band was confined to a space that allowed for little more than toe-tapping, and hence they were unable to display the vibrancy that one could so easily hear.

However, sultry vocalist Maria Dal Mar made excellent use of the space available to her, even using the column in the middle of the stage as a prop. When that was not enough, she used a chair in front of that column, or ventured out onto the floor when it suited her, displaying the energy of her renowned stage presence.

The crowd, initially slow to respond, found themselves increasingly animated by Maria as she ventured forth and invited members of the audience to participate, either vocally, as she passed the microphone from face to face, or simply by delivering her strong voice from the middle of the floor, where she could physically interact with the crowd. She downed the roof (literally) when she raised her arm, only to have a ceiling panel come crashing down on her.

The show itself was somewhat short, lasting about 75 minutes in one set - but leaving the audience satisfied in a way as unique as the music itself. The band returned for a two song encore, ending with a lively rendition of 'Shout'.

My only regret is that the show was not on a week-end night. Also the crowd, while of a fair size, could have been larger. Combined, the show would have been perfect, providing the party atmosphere that this band truly requires.

All in all, an excellent show, and I can only hope I don't have to wait another 2 1/2 years to see its like again. You can accuse me of bias, but in a world where so few expectations are satisfied, National Velvet certainly lived up to its reputation.

Get Classical

by Paul Campbell

Christmas approaches inevitably, and soon enough we will be satiated with Christmas Carols, or at least if you are like me, you will be. I thought that I might devote this column to carols so that you would know a bit more about what you are hearing and singing this holiday season.

If you lived in Merry Old England during the 12th century, you might have partaken in what was probably considered a sophisticated new form of entertainment. England had of course been successfully invaded by the Normans in 1066, and the French constituted the upper crumble of society, so their ways and manners were considered desirable. One of the things they introduced to England was the "carole", a song and dance form. The song was usually made up of a number of verses, followed by a fixed refrain. Often a solo voice would sing the verses, while everybody joined in the

refrain (like "On top of ol' Smoky, or "The North Atlantic Squadron"). The nifty thing about the carole (or carol, if you will) was that the singing was used as an accompaniment for dancing in a ring, and the dancers themselves sang it. We don't know anything about the dance steps used, but from the variety of rhythms in the early carols, it is probable that there were many, or perhaps they were improvised. At any rate, caroling soon became an entrenched and beloved activity in England of yore. Most of the carols dealt with the birth of Christ and the events that followed, so the carol became strongly associated with Christmas. In spite of their religious subject matter, the fathers of the medieval church viewed this singing and dancing with disfavor, and tried to suppress it. We can't really say that the carol went underground ("I was a closet Caroler!"), but it was practiced in defiance of the church until the 15th century when it was invited indoors, to become a part of the liturgical music used during the church service.

The carol was still to come on more hard times. Cromwell and the Puritans, who ruled England in the mid sixteen hundreds, disapproved of any forms of singing and dancing, or anything which brought pleasure. They abolished the carol, along with other forms of music making, and for that matter, in 1647, Christmas itself! The Restoration, which ended this period of barren and cruel rule saw the revival of music and dance, but apparently the carol had been forgotten.

It was not until early in this century that the practice of caroling was revived, using authentic carols from ancient times, such as "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen", "The Holly and the Ivy" or "We Wish You a Merry Christmas". "Good King Wenceslas" and several other beloved carols come from the Piae Cantiones, a collection of Swedish carols dating from 1582. More modern ones were adapted from the works of known composers. For instance, "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing" is based on a tune by Mendelssohn, and "Joy

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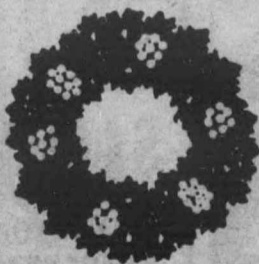


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