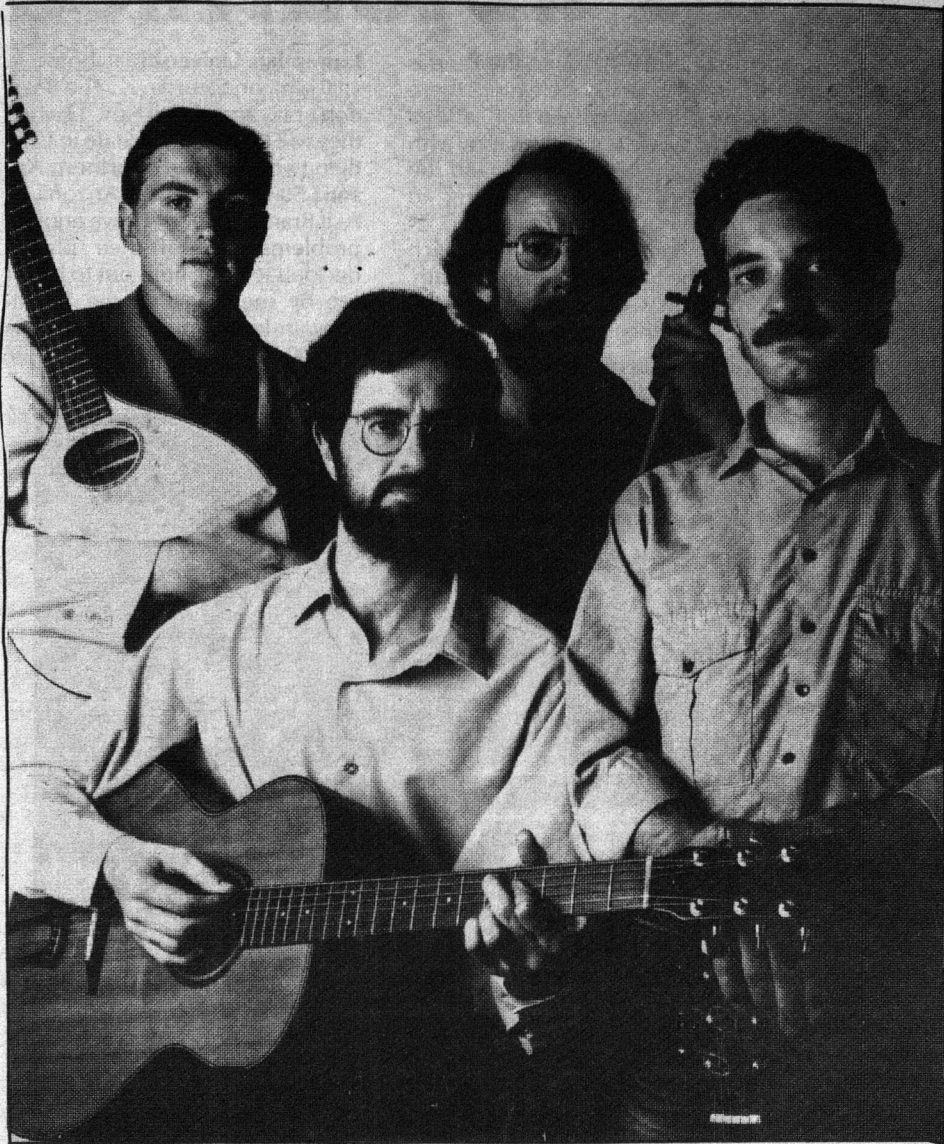


The Easy Club: raunchy 'n' raw rhythm and swing



The Easy Club: combining jazz and Scottish music

by Rod Campbell

When the Celtic musical Renaissance ran out of inspiration in the early eighties, the future of Irish and Scottish folk-music looked rather bleak for a period. The immediate Irish response was Moving Hearts, a band that wove inspiration from such diverse artists as Ornette Coleman and Paul McCartney into the fine thread of their traditional music. It took the Scots a little longer. But, in 1984 when the Easy Club released their debut album, a synthesis of reels and jigs textured to the swing of jazz, critics were almost unanimous in their approval.

The Easy Club have an immaculate pedigree in traditional musical circles. Guitarists Rod Patterson and Jack Evans were both members of the influential Jock Tamson's Bairns. Cittern player and main composer Jim Sutherland served his apprenticeship with Mirk. Perhaps best known to Edmonton audiences is fiddler John Martin, who as a member of Ossian played here a couple of years ago.

Initially Patterson, Evans and Sutherland got together for the purpose of making a B.B.C. Radio Scotland programme about the life of the Edinburgh poet Alan Ramsey, whose work had a great deal of influence on Robert Burns. From this venture they not only conceived the idea for forming a band but also found a name. It seems Ramsey frequented a drinking establishment known as the Easy Club, which was eventually closed down in 1715 because of its antipathy to the union between Scotland and England.

The band went into hibernation for most of 1983, experimenting with their music. Being an acoustic quartet by now they found themselves experiencing certain technical difficulties with their instruments. Approaching the noted Northumbrian instrument maker Stefan Sobell they had him make two guitars and a cittern that would give them the exact sound they wanted. As Jack Evans explains, "We really needed instruments quite apart from the style of the music, which demands a kind of punchy effect, that brought the acoustic volume up a bit... We went to Stefan and had a long talk with him, and he reckoned that he could make a cittern and guitar that were compatible with each other. . . We were extremely pleased with the result because the instruments are really bright sounding. The guitar actually has a very clean open sound. . . closer to a jazz guitar."

Duke Ellington once said that there were

only two types of music which possess swing; one was jazz the other was Scottish music. When the Easy Club emerged in the Spring of 1984 they combined both.

The progression to jazz influenced folk-music for the band was more natural than it seems. In Edinburgh, where they are based, the jazz musicians always mingle in sessions with the traditional musicians. From there the idea progressed. However, another source of jazz influence comes from the pipe bands, as the 'Club's' composer Jim Sutherland explains, "The drum sections in the pipe bands tend to be jazzy in their rhythms, particularly since the 50's. . . I'm influenced by the way that drummers accompany bagpipe players.

It is Sutherland's instrumental pieces written in chromatic scales that give the band their unique texture. Colorful pieces such as The Radical Road, Murdo Mackenzie of Torridon, The Easy Club Reel and Janine's Reel break all the traditional rules of structure.

Rod Patterson also emerged as a song writer of merit especially on "The Auld Toon Shuffle" — a clever social commentary on the economic structure of Edinburgh life. As Patterson states, "The song was a calculated risk. It's based on the legendary split that people claim exists in Edinburgh. The old poverty and pride bit, 'fur coats and nae knickers', that kind of idea. There's an element of that in all cities - the haves and havenots. It's just that Edinburgh has always had this legend attached to it that the Auld Toon is the place where the people who have not live, and the New Toon is the place where the haves live."

Now that the band has established its unique sound, what next? "We're trying to avoid oversophistication as a line of development," says Jack Evans, "because we really want to keep it raunchy and raw. I think we're more likely to introduce rhythms into the music which are not particularly jazzy, but rhythms which come from other kinds of 20th century music. I think most things we do will always have some kind of swing feel to them. It's why we call it rhythm and swing rather than just swing, because there are sounds which come from other types of music, ethnic music and different kinds of early pop which we use, and if anything, I see it developing along these lines rather than the more esoteric jazz direction."

The Easy Club makes their Edmonton debut Saturday night at The South Side Folk Club. Tickets are available at the Students' Union box office.

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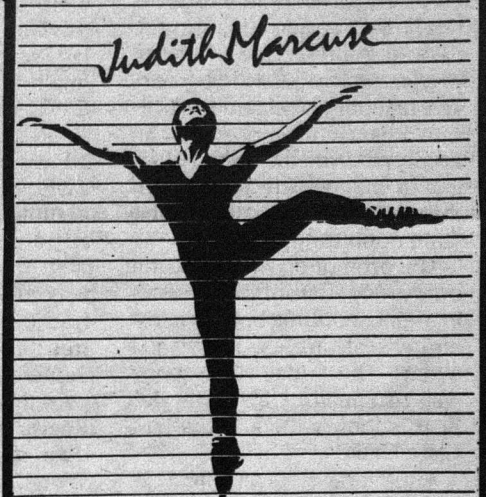
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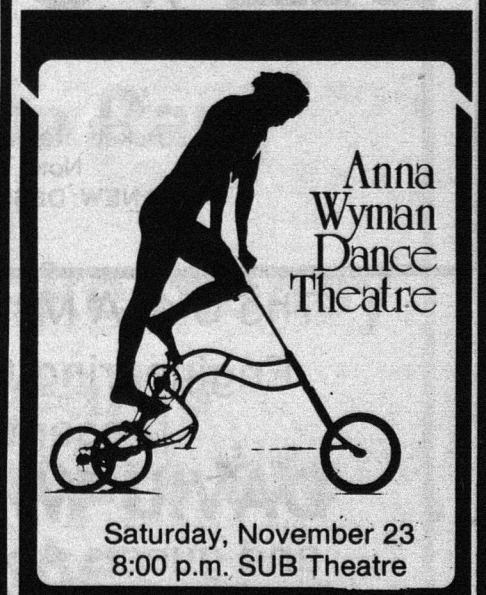
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