

In conversation with Lennie Gallant

by Mark Anderson

On March 22, Lennie Gallant, winner of four East Coast Music Awards, performed before a crowd of almost a thousand at the Rebecca Cohn auditorium. The concert was held as a benefit for Oxfam. The Gazette had an opportunity to speak with Mr. Gallant after the concert.

Gaz: To start with, tell us a bit about how you started playing, what music was like in your hometown, and who your influences were — general background stuff.

L.G.: When I was growing up in Rustico (P.E.I.), my parents were both involved in singing and my mother put on theatre productions, so going up on stage was probably pretty natural to me. As far as musical influences, there wasn't really much on the radio in P.E.I. at that time. What really started me off was a box of Bob Dylan records my uncle gave me one day. There was also the traditional influence. That stuff was always around, you'd hear it at weddings and stuff, but I never really grew up that way. I met Roy Johnston (a featured fiddler at the concert) and a couple of his friends who had just moved to P.E.I., and these guys were just fiddle fanatics... nuts for anything Celtic. I started jamming with them and listening to Irish Celtic Bands, the Rock n' Reel sound (Fairport, the Convention, Richard Thompson). Around that time we started up a band we called Speed The Plough, that played a combination of traditional and original. After that, I joined a band in Halifax called Tailor's Twist, that did jazz, traditional, and rock. At some point I decided to get back to the singer/songwriter stage and focus on my

own stuff, so I did, and I guess I brought a lot of that Celtic influence with me.

Gaz: Do you find that your success has changed your approach to your music, not that you're going to go Hollywood or anything, but has it opened new doors — given you more resources to draw from?

L.G.: Well, when you go into the business of trying to sell songs, obviously you want to reach as many people as you can. It enables you to put on better shows, play bigger ven-

"What really started me off was a box of Bob Dylan records"

ues... this concert was the first time we did our own show at the Cohn. You're not in this business to win awards, but I'm not going to deny the positive aspects of the exposure that comes with it. If it helps more people check out the music, I'll take it.

Gaz: Much of your work is strongly socially conscious. Do you feel a responsibility comes with being in the public eye, or is that too narrowly

"One thing I never want to do is preach"

defined?

L.G.: I don't feel any social responsibility. As a songwriter or artist, you're only as responsible as you feel. I write my songs based on emotion; whatever I'm feeling. If I'm moved by something I read in the newspaper, then I may want to write

about it. I feel quite comfortable with this. It's a funny thing though, the ones that are socially conscious are the ones that are going to grab people's attention. That stuff is going to make press before a song about relationships or life in general. I don't wrap myself in any flag or particular ideology. What I am is a singer/songwriter.

Gaz: Your Halifax concert was a benefit for Oxfam. How did you become connected with this organisation, and what can you say about your experiences with them and other groups in Guatemala?

L.G.: In the past I did some concerts for Tools For Peace. My manager used to live in Guatemala, and was involved in Latin American human rights. He was asked to go on the Human Rights Tour, and he suggested I come along. There were many groups at work, and it was very intense to hear their stories. For some, it was very dangerous work — involvement with street kids, and with people who were wounded by, or who had lost family members to the repressive regime in power. Most of the people affected were the indigenous natives — the Mayans. I was especially inspired by the way most of these people were hanging on to the concept of hope despite incredible odds. They opened my eyes to a lot of things, and from this experience I wrote the song "Land of the Maya". We did a benefit recording of it here in Halifax at CBC, and gave it to Oxfam. They are using the money to help the indigenous Guatemalans. This concert came out of that too.

Gaz: Do you have any final comments about yourself and your music?

L.G.: One thing I never want to do is preach. I like to write my songs like: Here's a story about this guy, here's the situation. I like the analogy of songwriting to trying to slow



Here's this guy. Here's this situation

down a river, just to get a better look at it.

Lennie Gallant returned to the Cohn stage twice Tuesday night to standing ovations.

The members of his band are Janet Munson on Fiddle, Chris Corrigan

on electric guitar, and Todd Harrie on Bass. Munson and Harrie also provide backup vocals. (David Burton sat in on drums). The band will be touring across Canada in April with Rawlin's Cross.

Thursday March 30
GWEN NOAH
dance benefit starring:
Cathy Jones
Jest In Time
Ian McKinnon
Mark MacMillan
Coyote, etc!

Friday March 31
Ili ORTON
HOGGIT
with trout
four dollars

Saturday April 1
COYOTE
MONOXIDES
PIGGY
four dollars

Wednesday April 5
DARK RED
LIGHT
with stain
three dollars

Thursday April 6
Birdland Blues Jam
BIG CITY
BLUES
BAND
two dollars

Friday April 7
SPINE
SINGLE RELEASE PARTY
greyhound tragedy
cleveland steamer
four dollars

Saturday April 8
MONSTER VOO
DOO MACHINE
single
white male
four dollars

Wednesday April 12
EVERY DAMN
SUNDAY
Dave Carmichael
David Newland
three dollars

Thursday April 13
SANDBOX
CD RELEASE PARTY
purple
helmets

WEDNESDAY APRIL 15
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with friends
four dollars

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