

Jeff Healy: Guitar Hero Revisited

By Chris Hunt

I had a long discussion the other day with a friend about the fate of music. Specifically, the Beatles album "Sgt. Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band" was the main stripe on the conversational ball being slapped around. The argument was that the introduction of studio music of the type inspired by this album represented the death of many of the forms of good old rock and roll. This is, to a certain extent (and I had to comply on many points) true in many ways. With the advent of conceptually interesting and carefully planned and engineered albums came the genesis of home listening and the death of the forty-five, the live bootleg, and the spontaneity of the jam session. This is not to say that all this is necessarily bad, but somehow the need for technical album perfection spilled over into the live concert venue, as less and less musically discriminating crowds began demanding shows that were more and more close to the actual album sound. Thus the creation of the Floyd generation seems to have led to the death of the Almond Brothers. While the Beatles realized this problem and as a result did not even attempt to tour a live show, the impact of their innovative engineering and style still can be viewed as the driving force behind the new movement towards what eventually (I think) mutated into what will go down in history as the "Milli Vanilli syndrome."

Thus, having had this rather depressing discussion just days before the Jeff Healy concert at the Aitken Centre, I will admit a certain amount of apprehension about seeing one of the few true guitar heroes left in a large concert setting. My apprehension was also fueled by Healy's last attempt at an album which, to me, was not a good effort. The travesty that was the movie "Roadhouse" being the major factor in Healy's recent

success (and subsequently the reason for his playing such a large venue as opposed to a good old smoky bar), had depressed me no end and while it does the heart good to see someone Canadian make it big, I felt we had probably lost yet another true rocker to the glitter and glamour scene.

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A long trudge in the cold and the snow (shades of the last time I saw Healy at the Social Club, also in the midst of a blinding snowstorm) and a rather tense few minutes as I negotiated my way into the concert on a press pass later, I entered the Aitken center to be aurally assaulted with what has become the hallmark of Aitken Center sound - muck. I will admit respect for the opening act - Barney Bentall and the Legendary Heart - but as a result of the muddy bass, muffled drums and lack of any high-end quality, I could not form any really tangible opinion. The crowd seemed to enjoy it, but I can't help feeling that if the sound quality could be boosted by as little as twenty percent, the characteristically tiny crowds at the Aitken Centre might double.

Then The Jeff Healy Band came out. Initially, their sound was as bad as Bentall's, but after the first tune you could hear the sound technicians begin to wrestle the quality into auditory submission. The kick drum tightened, the high hat began to sparkle, and Healy's guitar cut through the mix with the whine of a stinger in mid-summer. Hats off to the techs - suddenly we had a show.

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and roll. Healy has progressed immensely as a guitar player since the last time I saw him, and his Hendrixian - Framptonesque style has developed into soulful and heavy genius with a truly distinctive edge. A larger than life guitar hero, pulled up out of the roots of the great age of Clapton, Frampton, Hendrix, Beck and many others, Healy brings spontaneity back to the stage - playing a double - necked guitar behind his head and with his teeth, swinging his instrument around like a scimitar, drinking a glass of water while continuing to solo beautifully, switching guitars mid-song, breaking strings, standing on his chair, jumping off the drum riser (you have to remember that this man is blind), and the finality and passion of straight-arming his guitar in the last wailing, thumping strains of "See The Light", and letting it drop with an audible and primitively satisfying crunch to the stage floor as the last cymbal fades out - all hallmarks of the true live guitar hero, a lost art recreated with driving legitimacy and power. Wow.

So Healy hasn't sold out or really compromised, and he forms to the large venue with as much intensity as possible, laser show (truly impressive and satisfyingly tasteful), big stage and all. As an entertainer, he is remarkably visual for someone who can't see, and he interacts wonderfully on an auditory basis with his audience, responding to yelled questions to create a individual interaction that can make you forget you are in a room that seats five thousand people. There was no element of what might have been seen as "freak show" antics (a personal worry), as Healy, although blind, did not seem to get up and jump around as a gimmick, but as a genuine expression of his relationship with the music and his guitar. I was more than suitably impressed and am actually looking forward to his next album, although I hope he can see the light and not rely on big shots like Harrison to fill the grooves - I want to hear pure Healy, as I felt I did on Wednesday night.



Margison and Fortin to Debut Atlantic Tour in Fredericton

The UNB/STU Creative Arts Committee presents tenor Richard Margison and soprano Lyne Fortin, accompanied by pianist Michael McMahon, in concert at Memorial Hall on the UNB campus this Sunday, January 17 at 8 p.m. as part of their Debut Atlantic tour. Tickets at the door are \$10 for adults, \$8 for seniors and \$3 for students.

A consummate musician and gifted stage performer, Richard Margison appears regularly with Canada's top opera companies and symphony orchestras. The recipient of several prizes and awards including First Prize in the DuMaurier Search for Stars, Mr. Margison has played over 50 roles in opera, including Ottavia (*Don Giovanni*) with both Edmonton and Calgary Opera, Pinkerton (*Madama Butterfly*), and Riccardo

(*A Masked Ball*) with the English National Opera.

Winner of the 1988 Luciano Pavarotti Competition, Lyne Fortin has a superb soprano voice, a model of delicate phrasing and pure vocalism. Miss Fortin won First Prize in the prestigious Montreal Symphony Orchestra competition of the Quebec Opera Foundation. She has performed with the symphonies of Montreal and Quebec, with the Radio Canada Chamber Orchestra, and with the Graz Symphony. Recent engagements include the role of Suzanna (*The Marriage of Figaro*) with l'Opera de Quebec and in Handel's *Messiah* with the National Arts Centre Orchestra.

Michael McMahon is in great demand as a vocal accompanist. A sensitive, assured and perceptive musician, he has toured extensively with such ensembles as the Tudor Singers of Montreal. Mr. McMahon accompanied Kevin McMillan, baritone, and Sonia Racine, mezzo-soprano, on a Debut Atlantic tour in 1989, and has also recorded an album on the Marquis label with another Debut Atlantic artist, Catherine Robbin, mezzo-soprano.

Debut Atlantic's 1990-91 touring season is generously supported by Season Sponsors Glenora Distillers and Imperial Oil. The 50 Debut Atlantic concerts over the coming months will offer Atlantic Canadians an opportunity to hear Canada's most outstanding classical musicians.

NEW TALENT COMPETITION

Start planning now for your entry in New Talent '91, the annual competition sponsored by the UNB/STU Creative Arts Committee for full-time students at UNB(F) and STU. Cash prizes will be awarded in the following categories:

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| I VISUAL ARTS | - painting, drawing, prints, sculpture, photography, fabric arts |
| II POETRY | - a poem or group of poems (maximum 150 lines) |
| III MUSIC COMPOSITION | - score or recorded on cassette (maximum 5 minutes) |
| IV SHORT FICTION | - short story (maximum 2500 words) (New this year!) |

Deadlines for entries -- Monday, March 4, 1991, at the Art Centre, Mem Hall. Visual entries must be ready for display; poems and short fiction must be typed.

Selected entries on display in Memorial Hall from March 10 to 17, 1991.

Reception, awarding of prizes, readings and performance of music in Memorial Hall on Sunday, March 17, from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Enquiries to Prof. Ronald M. Lees, 453-4723

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For additional information call
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