

Battlefield Band captures audience

**Battlefield Band
Orange Hall**

review by Sherri Ritchie

Innovation, politics, and all around musical quality are fundamental aspects of the Battlefield Band. They have been on the folk scene since 1969, when fiddler Brian McNeill and keyboardist Alan Ried got together as students at Strathclyde University in Glasgow.

These two have been on the road full time since the resurgence of Celtic folk music in the mid-seventies, and through a succession of 12 albums and tours upon tours, have seen members come and go.

Douglas Pincock (on pipes) and Alistair Russel (on guitar) have been part of the quartet for some years now and it is obvious from their concert last Thursday that they have all had more than enough experience together to put on a first rate show.

The atmosphere of the Orange Hall was homey and the people warm and friendly. The feeling was reminiscent of my youth in rural Manitoba when we would go to concerts in the church basement. Their stage show fit that same mold: four musicians on a low stage in front of a small group of people.

There were no bright lights, flashy clothes or backdrops, just the band and their music. The simplicity of the stage show added to the atmosphere, but the quality of the music would have overpowered any special gimmicks the band could have used.

They started off both sets with a couple of rousing tunes that really got the crowd going. There were a few more reels and flings thrown in throughout, all of which were executed very successfully and the audience participation in all of these was fantastic.

The crowd was cheering, clapping and stomping, and naturally when the band played a traditional Irish pub song, everyone sang along. That was the nature of their show: they were there not just to perform, they were there for the audience. From joking with people in the crowd to making us all put our fingers in our ears (for no apparent reason), it was obvious that the crowd was an



intrinsic part of their performance.

One very original piece was what Alistair explained they wrote to help cope with Scotland winters (and summers). "Amid visions of palm trees and warm tropical breezes," he said, "we wrote a little sunshine into this piece. So it's not a strathspey, but a strathsumba." They then struck into a traditional Glasgow reel with Latin American dance rhythms. They played the flute and guitar in

conjunction with maracas and electric congas — and it worked!

As an encore, more innovation: what Alistair professed to be Scottish traditional heavy metal — and heavy it was. They very effectively used the synthesizer and bagpipes to give it a real rock twist, and added a great touch with their play on the typical rock concert stage show. There were timely screams, erratic jumping, and Alan even

played the keyboards with his mouth.

The highlight of the show (at least for anyone who enjoys Creedence Clearwater Revival) would have to be their rendition of "Bad Moon Rising" with bagpipes no less. They ripped out what will probably be one of the most successful versions of that classic ever.

What stood to be the best part of the show was the ballads. They all have historical significance and being told the story behind the songs was half the enjoyment. "Ireland Earth No More" sang of the Highlanders who were forcibly removed from their land in the late 1800's. Some of them, with no other place to go, had to leave their homeland and emigrate to the United States, Canada, and Australia. The lament of the bagpipes in the middle of this piece communicating the Highlanders' longing for their homeland and Alan's lead vocals for this were magnificent. "Dear Green Place" told of the history of the city of Glasgow. It tells of the loss of the Glasgow that used to be a "dear green place" and had become a crowded city where the only reward for your toil and sweat was another day, and ultimately the cold thankless grave.


In all of the ballads, the poetry of the lyrics is unsurpassed and "The Yew Tree" was no exception. The yew tree, a traditional symbol of grief and death, stands beside the highway separating Scotland and England and the song is addressed to it. The lyrics deal with the ugly history of Scotland and the tone is one of great despair, as in the rest of the ballads.

Musically, the Battlefield Band is a band in the truest sense of the word. From the intensely stirring bagpipes and gentle flute to the fantastic and innovative use of keyboards, the talent of each member shone through both on their own and in conjunction with the others. Their voices together rang with a deep harmonious resonance that seemed to rise from the earth itself and their lyrics are indicative of the creativity and compositional excellence of the band.

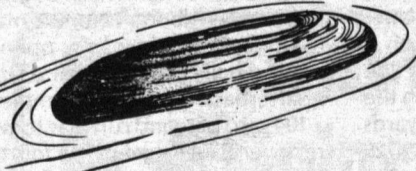
This quartet is definitely one of the most innovative, professional, and talented bands in folk today: a must to look into!

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