

Bonanza of offbeat acts

Love's Laughter
Even Keel of Love
Shawn Pinchbeck
Kieth Wedesh
Jack Cymermen
Brian Golightly
Chinook Theatre

review by Stephen A. Noble

What happened on Friday night at the Chinook Theatre wouldn't have been anything out of the ordinary, but as far as Edmonton is concerned, it wasn't just your average Friday night. It was, in fact, an evening that River City badly needed.

To call it a gig wouldn't go anywhere near doing it justice: Music Bonanza, perhaps, is more suitable. For instance, when was the last poetry reading in Edmonton? When was the last time you saw live electronic experimental music here? When was the last time you saw a promising alternative band? As I said, Friday night was a bit of a bonanza, featuring all of these together.

Brian Golightly (ex-Langham Wheel and ex-Seventh Day), began by setting the tone for the rest of the evening. His lengthy impromptu keyboard solo was very dark, very ambient and very moody. Despite problems with muffled sound that infringed on his talented playing, this kind of start to the evening was a definite treat. Such a pleasant change from second rate hardcore basement bands, who always annoyingly appear at the start of shows, gracing the impatient audience with nothing but sickly sounds.

Shawn Pinchbeck, the lone man with all the gadgets, followed up with some experimental electronic adventures. Along with Psyche, Pinchbeck was probably the only other source of this kind of music in Edmonton, and since Psyche is long gone, only he remains. He began with some interesting pieces, which at times were no less than danceable. He made me feel rather sad that

he's the only one left to support this kind of music. After a while, however, his adventurous electronic ramblings began to drag, becoming just too detached, just too schizophrenic and just too loud.

Poetry recitals are also sadly absent in Edmonton. Even when they do occur, they are poorly attended. I don't know what it is, because even on Friday night people didn't even seem to be willing to give it a chance, though it turned out that that was all it was worth.

Many people will argue about poetry's structure, some sticking firmly to the traditional style, others taking the stand point of sound poetry, which goes against almost everything traditional. The assortment provided by local boys Kieth Wedesh (ex-Psyche) and Jack Cymermen had me scratching my head. It seems almost pointless to recite words, which obviously have a message, and then proceed to distort them almost beyond distinction with just plain stupid voice effects and irrelevant backing noises. It all came across as just an awful mess, being somewhere between sound poetry and something more traditional. No doubt, someone will call it "Art," but I'd tell him to stop lying to himself and do the same with his mouth as he does with the zip on his trousers in the morning; shut it tightly so that it doesn't open in public and cause you extreme embarrassment. I just might have heard Shakespeare turning in his grave.

A welcome change of pace came with Even Keel of Love. If you haven't seen this band, then you're missing something. All felt Cocteau Twins and Dead Can Dance comparisons aside, they're probably the best thing around in Edmonton at the moment. The three members, who made up the core of the now-defunct Langham Wheel and Seventh Day, have only one problem: they just can't seem to organize themselves and get something serious going. They are the only band of their kind in Edmonton, a style which is influenced heavily by the above-mentioned bands, and do what they do

extremely well. Mandy's voice, though mixed badly, fits smoothly over the catchy rhythms and lovely melodies. Michael Turner's guitar playing was nothing short of superb, especially on an extremely short solo piece which I think was the best thing I've ever heard from a local band. They end with a great rendition of the old Langham Wheel song "Again," which enjoyed brief success on the CJSR charts some time ago. If only they would get themselves organized and shake off some of their obvious influences slightly.

Loves Laughter, however, are a band who definitely look as if they're deadly serious. Made up of members from SNFU, Euthanasia and the now-defunct Utopia, they filled the tiny Chinook Theatre with a very big sound, sometimes a very angry sound but always a controlled sound. Comparisons to Joy Division, albeit a more polished Joy Division, would not be out of order. They just might have the most innovative rhythm section of any local band I've ever seen. The saxophone and keyboards provided tasteful texture to a sound which would otherwise

have been raw. Just one problem lads: get yourselves a soundman quick!

If you missed them on Friday you'll have a chance to see them again soon when they play Flashbacks in November. This is perhaps a more suitable venue, because although the Chinook Theatre is very cosy, it provides no space for audience participation, which is right up Love's Laughter's street.

Friday night provided a lot of good things, as some newer local talent were given the chance to let the public hear what they're doing. Quite sadly, however, underlying all this is a rather dismal fact. At the moment, bands like Even Keel of Love and Love's Laughter, bands of a more innovative nature, are scarce in this city, and I'm sure it's not because of lack of potential. In order for talent like this to develop, a band needs an outlet, a place where the musicians can brush up their live performances and get feedback from the public. If Edmonton had only one more stable club which could find the right balance between recorded and live music, then perhaps evenings like this one wouldn't only come but once a year.

Morrison composes

Van Morrison
Poetic Champions Compose
Caledonia Productions

review by Darren O'Donnell
 "Sittin' up on the mountain-top in the solitude where the morning fog comes rollin' in just might do me some good"

Sings Morrison in "Alan Watts Blues," one of the sparkling songs on his latest release *Poetic Champions Compose*, and one gets the feeling that it is exactly from those fog-shrouded mountains that Morrison has taken his inspiration.

Morrison has been around for a long, long time and has created some of the most influential music in the last two decades, initially with his band Them and then as a solo artist. He recorded such stupendously classic albums as *Moon Dance* and *Astral Weeks*, both of which hold up today as fantastic works of art.

Listening to Morrison's recent efforts one gets the feeling that he has remained faithful to himself, to his inner instinct without having to answer to anyone. *Poetic Champions Compose* continues this tradition although not quite as effectively as his previous album *No Guru No Method No Teacher*. Nonetheless, it features heartfelt, soulful and often very spiritual music. He savours and revels in the joys of living in songs such as "The Mystery" where he sings:

"You've got to dance and sing
 And be alive in the mystery"

And be joyous and give thanks
 And let yourself go"

Morrison even mixes his own personal style with a dash of country gospel in the upbeat "Give me my Rapture." In "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child," he takes a traditional song, and gives us a glimpse at his sad side, not one of regrets but of passionate soul-searching. Even in his darkest moments there always is a glimmer of hope:

"Sometimes I feel like freedom is here
 But we're so far from home."

As always, Morrison's choice of instruments and arrangements are very carefully crafted, particularly his use of strings and woodwinds which sneak up and surprise the listener on songs such as "I Forgot That Love Existed" and "Queen of the Slipstream."

Particularly excellent are the three instrumental tracks "Spanish Steps," "Celtic Excavation" and "Allow Me." In these songs, Morrison himself weaves a soothing web on a sultry saxophone which wraps around your ears like an angora blanket.

The only sour note on the album is the extremely schmaltzy "Did Ye Get Healed?" but the irritation is brief, outweighed by the worth of the other songs.

With *Poetic Champions Compose*, Morrison has once again crafted an excellent album for those who just want to lay back and listen to music while drinking tea and watching the last leaves drifting down from the trees.



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