

It Still Ain't Easy: An Evening with Long John Baldry

Dear Chris: Is it an editor's trick just to try and f*lk up his writers? You tell me that I review well, but that I must find something out of place in the shows I do! Well, why don't you give me a show that's terrible? You keep giving me the best, most professional shows and I'm trying my damndest to find screw ups! Well, I'm sorry man, but you gave me another winner!!

Baldry had 'em banging the brew bottles for ten minutes Tuesday night at the Social Club just for "one more tune." The show was so successful with the handful (60-70) of people that showed up, that ol' Long John stayed for Wednesday night as well. Hats off to Matt Harris this time...in a big way!!

I've seen Baldry a number of times in small venues such as the auditorium at the University of Victoria and Fredericton's Chestnut Inn. I've also seen him play arena venues; for example he opened for Eddie Money in 1979 at the Max Bell Arena in Calgary. The smaller venues seem to suit Baldry much better in terms of comfortability. His music, mostly blues, is very intimate and one can't help but feel the caring and personal connection with the audience that creates a special ambiance at a Long John Baldry show.

I talked with him after the Tuesday gig and he reinforced this perception stating that "I've always liked the small bar venues, they're much more intimate." The title track of his new album **It Still Ain't Easy**, drives this point directly home.

John's partner in crime of seventeen years, Kathi MacDonald, added her thoughts saying "When you have all these lights shining on you, you can't see the faces. There is no contact with your audience. We've played the big venues and you can't get close with 50,000 people." Kathi is a little tiny woman with a great big voice. She can belt out the blues like no other female Canadian singer I've ever heard! Her vocals really can't be described as "backing." The way she complements Baldry makes most every song seem like a duet. I mentioned to Kathi that from the first time I heard them perform together, I sensed a great loyalty to John on her part. She replied with a warm smile and said "We have a lot of fun working together and we hope to continue for the foreseeable future."

Her greatest feat on **It Still Ain't Easy** is *Insane Asylum*; her vocal range is nothing less than amazing. Although the recording quality of **It Still Ain't Easy** is second to none, it can't capture the strength of Kathi's live performance. For the first encore, John and Kathi delivered a moving rendition of the old Righteous Brother's tune *You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling*. If you hadn't realized the power of Kathi's voice by this point, it surely hit you full force during this old standby which, incidentally, John and Kathi broke the top-ten with in 1979.

John is a very humble performer. He ranks with the biggest stars, but, unlike most he is very forthcoming and personable. He leaves the stage several times during the show so that his band members can take the spotlight and display their particular strengths. Kathi did two songs in her own as did John Lee Sanders who plays saxophone and keyboards and sings. All the band members are top-notch musicians who don't know the meaning of the word "mistake."

There was a time, Chris, when I would have had lots of criticism for a Baldry gig. Baldry is a class "A" showman: smooth as silk. His performances use to be highly structured with much precision. Every move was perfectly orchestrated making each show identical to the last. This left alot to be desired. Shows seemed somewhat boring and a little phony. n As well, Baldry was right into the substance abuse and by the third set, performances were shaky to say the least. My faith is renewed with this latest tour! John is straight as an arrow. Any rumors of his getting loaded are dispelled. I visited John at the hotel on Wednesday and he, having just awoken, was sharp as a pin. Baldry is not only out, he's right back on top! His show is not as precisely choreographed this time around. There is lots of room for spontaneity and innovation. For example, Baldry was supposed to take a half hour break between sets on Tuesday evening but, instead, played right on through. He seems much more at ease than on previous tours and his natural gentility and charisma certainly shine.

I asked John about his present contact with some of the stars whose careers he has helped to launch. He told me that he "Hadn't seen **Elton John** in many years" but maintains steady contact with **Rod Stewart** and the **Rolling Stones**. He spent three days with the Stones when the Steel Wheels tour hit Vancouver. Apparently it took more time to recover from the party than one would have hoped for.

With the release of **It Still Ain't Easy**, John has been touring steadily, beginning in Edmonton. He is definitely no stranger to the tough touring life style but, at fifty years of age this year, he still loves to perform and promote his music. He told me that in May or June he'll take the **It Still Ain't Easy** tour to his native England where he hasn't performed for a long, long time and he's looking forward to visiting his old haunts and old friends. As Baldry puts it: "It will certainly be quite a treat!"

To those of you who didn't catch **Long John Baldry** at the CHSC, thanks very much for staying the hell home and giving us loyal and true fans a much appreciated break! It was nice to have some elbow room; something that is rare wherever Baldry performs. For those who did attend, we saw one of this years best shows...know what I mean? On his departure, I wished Long John the very best from all of us and told him that we were hoping to "Rock With The Best!" for many years to come. He wished me well and gave me some soundly reinforced advice: "Don't Try To Lay No Boogie-Woogie On The King Of Rock And Roll!" And now, Mr. Editor, give me a band that I can trash!!

Mark I. Minor

For Further impressions see
"Random Notes" pg. 22

