

ARTS

Spirit of the West: "Far too Canadian"?

BY KATHRYN MORRIS
AND STEPHANIE NOLEN

SPIRIT OF THE WEST played a sold-out show at the SUB on October 23. It was the kind of energetic, no-holds-barred performance the band is known for. But long-time fans who came anticipating note-for-note renditions of folk classics from *Labour Day* or *Tripping up the Stairs*, would have been disappointed.

MUSIC
Spirit of the West
McInnes Room

That mellow folk sound is gone. Spirit of the West has abandoned the lyrical acoustic power of their previous five albums. Instead: roots rock meets acid house. Their new

really run its course."

And offended fans can take heart: Kelley says that Spirit of the West hasn't abandoned folk forever.

"I think that the next album will be a melding of the two styles," Kelley predicts. "It's kind of like we did album seven before album six."

Spirit of the West hasn't abandoned their political edge. But instead of the dark anger that colours songs like "Dirty Pool" and "Profiteers", on earlier releases, their new material is personally political.

"We use ourselves as an example," says Kelley about the new attitude. "For a period there I think we felt that if we sang anything with a political slant, we were doing our part. And then we took a good hard look at ourselves and

"We're able to give people some reinforcement in their beliefs, people who might believe things that are left of centre," Kelley says.

"We get accused of preaching to the converted a lot. That may be the case," Kelley says. "But when you believe in something slightly different you need support."

Kelley says they sing songs like "Take it From the Source" and "Far Too Canadian" to give strength to those who share their ideas.

"People feel that its like having a big arm on the shoulder saying 'it's OK to feel this way, this country can be a lot better of a place.'"

Kelley says that the entertainment role of the band is also important. The vibrant energy of their music attracts listeners who may not share the band's opinions, but

days later they start to think about a line that stays in their head."

The opinions which run so close to the surface in much of Spirit of the West's music are genuine. Kelley says that playing "Homelands" (about land claims) to a largely Aboriginal audience, or "Save This House" at the Stein Valley Festival, a fundraiser for the preservation of British Columbian Rain Forest, is gratifying.

The band has always taken a special interest in Western Canadian issues like these.

"For our songs it has to affect us personally, and hit very close to home," Kelley says. "I think that's why a lot of our songs do deal with British Columbia and why we originally called the band Spirit of the West."

The defiant mood that pervaded previous Spirit of the West albums is gone. Kelley says there is more optimism in their music now: "It's hard now to summon up that same anger and angst."

And the acoustic sound is down for the count. But a concern for social and environmental issues, as well as powerful and stirring music, remains.

As the enthusiastic response to last Wednesday's show proved, there are many people who appreciate the band's new, harder sound. And Spirit of the West is still out to show them a great time.



album, *Go Figure*, has a great deal of what SOTW's Geoff Kelley politely calls "crunch." It's a hard electric sound quite unlike anything heard from the band before.

The new sound shocked and dismayed longtime fans who bought *Go Figure* when it was released in the late spring, listened once, and put it away.

But Kelley wishes that those people would give the band a chance.

"If they really care about the band they'll let us do what we want," he says. "If we hadn't done this we would have broken up."

"We needed the change so badly. We'd been doing the acoustic thing for so many years. We felt it had

decided that we weren't doing nearly enough.

"There are lines in "Far Too Canadian" that are hard for us to sing, like 'We never march in demonstrations/ We hold our breath for arbitration.' That's true, we don't go out and demonstrate."

Kelley says the band members have begun to take that kind of action as people, as well as musicians. For example, at gigs last year they encouraged people to sign postcards protesting Canada's militaristic role in the Gulf War.

The political tone of Spirit of the West's music has always been an important element of their popularity, and Kelley says that the band takes this role seriously.

Kelley hopes they will listen long enough to rethink some of their beliefs.

"I think we challenge a lot of concrete ideas people may have," he says. "They come just to hear the show, and they enjoy the music, but then hopefully a couple of

But he is comfortable with the diversity of material which has been evident in the last two albums. He says that the travelling the band has been doing, including recent gigs in Germany, Switzerland and England, has brought a more global outlook to their songwriting.

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Time: **12:00 Noon**
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