

Grappelli impeccable performer



Grappelli Master jazz violinist

by Sandy MacDonald
Stéphane Grappelli Concert
Friday, Oct. 5

It occurred to me, while standing in the lobby of the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium last Friday evening, that few contemporary artists would be able to draw such a smorgasbord of characters as those filing into the theatre to witness one of the true masters of the jazz idiom, violinist Stéphane Grappelli.

There were the older ones, the white-haired faithful who remember Grappelli as part of the famed quintet of the Hot Club in Paris during the late thirties, playing with gypsy guitarist Django Reinhardt.

And there were the younger ones, perhaps learning of Grappelli through his recording work with jazz legends, Oscar Peterson, Bill Coleman and Barney Kessel. But the age difference soon melted into the night when the slender, almost fragile snowy-haired gentleman appeared to a tumultuous welcome from the appreciative audience.

In his usual Quartet format, Grappelli creates an atmosphere of both intimacy and excitement. The group's

visual as well as musical contact draw four separate elements into one, producing an honesty and sincerity not often found in this world of musical hype and technical showmanship.

A relaxed stage, dotted with potted greenery and a minimum of electronic clutter ideally suited the atmosphere of the performance and allowed the audience to drift back to Grappelli's early days. In that small, dimly lit cafe Hot Club, he and Django developed a style of improvisational jazz that has become standard fare for many of today's jazz-rock musicians, such as Al Dimeola, Jeff Beck and others.

Lightning fast three octave runs from his two guitar players expertly counterpointed Grappelli's own flashy violin style, all being held together by a rock-steady guitar rhythm and an acoustic double bass. Sometimes controlled, fluent and teasing, other times bold, striking, always captivating, Grappelli's technical and spiritual grasp of the violin indelibly stamps his own trademark on every piece he performs. Only he has such a way of teasing a tune, taunting the melody with incredibly complex harmonizing yet playing with such apparent ease.

His selection of material ideally suited the inherent warmth of his 'wooden' music. During his beautiful

rendering of Herman Hupfield's classic 'As Time Goes By', Grappelli's haunting violin conjures up the scene in Casablanca in which Humphrey Bogart, drunk and despondent in his deserted cafe, listens as Dooley Wilson plays and croons the memory-evoking strains of 'As Time Goes By.'

In the two sets, the group's music varied broadly, from a series of classical jazz pieces to a short Gershwin medley, featuring 'I Got Rhythm' and 'Someone To Watch Over Me'. To the apparent delight of the audience, he performed a spirited version of Stevie Wonder's 'Sunshine of My Life', featuring one of his talented guitarists.

The quiet Frenchman's own charm and sincerity radiate on stage. His guitarists, Martin Taylor and John Ethridge, both of London, England and stateside bass player Todd Coolman of New York complement Grappelli's virtuosity and together they cohere into a tight yet flowing foursome.

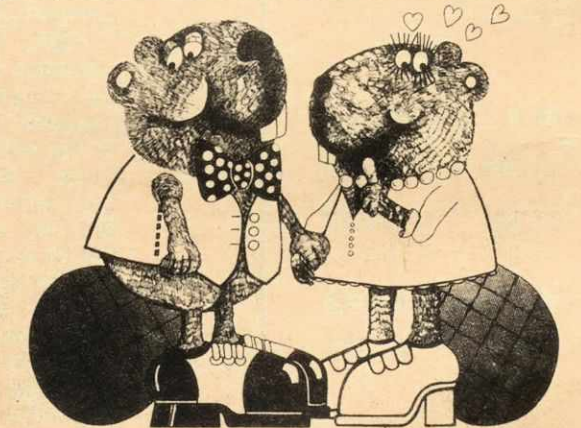
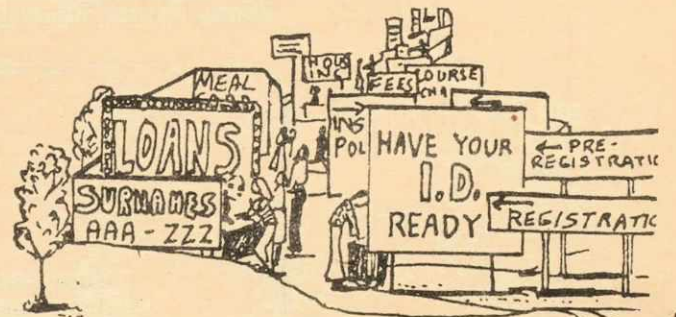
The group has just begun an abbreviated American tour making stopovers at the Place des Arts in Montreal before heading to the 'Big Apple' for a series of concerts.

With the exception of a minor technical flaw at the beginning, Friday's show provided Halifax with an impeccable performance, so characteristic of this fine artist.



Rum flavoured.
Wine dipped.

Crack a pack of Colts along with the cards.

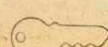


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