



ARTS & CULTURE

HALIFAX METRO CENTRE EXTRAVAGANZA

Disappointing the country fans

BY JOHN CULLEN

"Sorry we couldn't wait for you," remarked Jim Cuddy to late-comers at Blue Rodeo's concert last Friday in the Metro Centre.

The band had things to accomplish, and the train had already left the station. They shunned the idea of an opening act, deciding to keep the evening for themselves. And with a double-set show clocking in at over three hours, Blue Rodeo had ample time to accomplish anything they wanted.

The concert was stellar in every vague definition of the word, but the real action was happening in the audience.

It seems that Blue Rodeo appeals to two distinct demographics. Big-haired valley wives with husbands in tow (or transplanted valley girls and their 'big city' significant others) packed most of the seats. The others

really liked "Lost Together", but didn't know much else.

People who were expecting a country hoe-down were left baffled by Blue Rodeo's defiantly unclassifiable repertoire. They slipped from psychedelic Neil Young-ish power pop (complete with disjointed guitar solos courtesy of Greg Keelor) into the worn shoes of down-home country blues. However, in the periphery of my vision I saw some people leave for their trucks and the long drive back to Antigonish.

"Gee Lorraine, I thought they was a country band."

Blame it on CMT.

But those who stayed indulged in three hours of some of the best singing/songwriting in Canada. Intelligent yet not too abstract lyrics supported by simple melodies is what Blue Rodeo is all about. Often tight, polished album makers, they used the

Metro Centre to let their studio music breathe. The solos (especially those by keyboardist James Gray) were lengthy but never lost focus of the structured song. Friday night, Blue Rodeo proved that they were Canada's answer to Mecca bands like Phish and the Grateful Dead.

As for decor, Blue Rodeo substituted glitz and rock concert cliché with an almost bare stage. It was plywood, 2x4's, and steel decorated with the ambience of a trashy rehearsal room: a persian rug, amps, mics and one lonely burning stick of incense. The minimalist approach may not be original (Zeppelin barely used lights), but such a band does not need perfumed packaging. They are members of a small group of artists with superb voices, lyrical skill, a respect for their roots and the ability to survive no matter what big labels throw at the public.

Disrupting the peace in Halifax

BY PHIL LEWIS

The Our Lady Peace concert at the Metro Centre last Saturday was a powerful show even if you were not high at the time. The show was surrounded in a haze of smoke which had the distinct smell of pot.

While waiting for the show to begin, I watched the people walking by to see what kind of crowd the band was pulling in. The audience was comprised mostly of teenyboppers. I felt old.

The show was opened by a 45-minute set by the band Everclear from Portland, Oregon. You may remember them as the guys who did that "Santa Monica" song, or by their current video which opens with ambulance sounds. They are a generic rock band at best who play songs that have little meaning. They also use the gimmick of performing in suits. Picture a slightly more mature Presidents of the United States of America with the volume dial at ten.

Having said that, Everclear was able to fulfil an opening act's duty; they worked the crowd into a pumped-up frenzy. The band played well and actually surprised me when they switched to an acoustic arrangement. At the beginning, I thought they were hitting us over the head with volume to cover up their inadequacies as musicians, but the two acoustic offerings proved that these guys can actually play.

They finished the show with "Santa Monica" and tried to get the crowd to sing parts of the song. The band must have forgotten that the song is about 2 or 3 years old, and only their core fans really knew the lyrics. But the audience caught on after awhile, so it wasn't a total screw-up.

During the 30 minute intermission the audience was treated to a vintage episode of *The Twilight Zone* about a ventriloquist going mad from hearing voices from his dummy. The only connections to Our Lady Peace as far as I could tell were the images

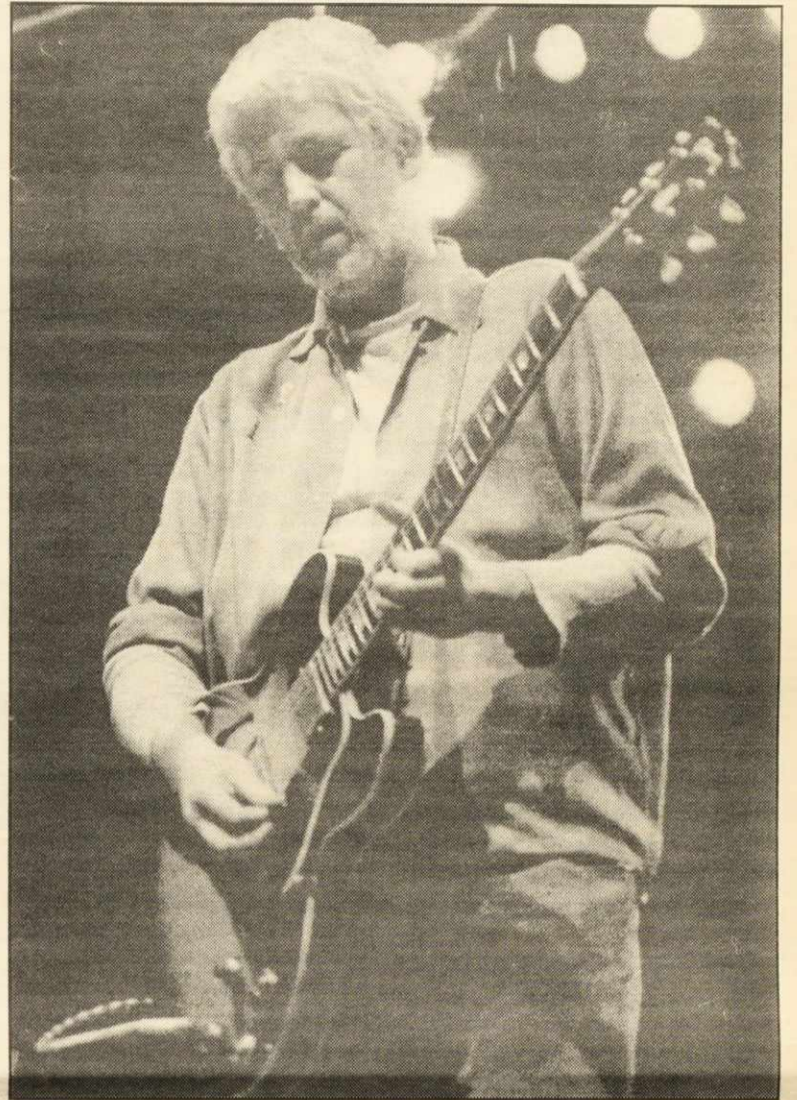
of ventriloquist dummies in the *Clumsy* liner notes and the "Naveed" video.

It wasn't long before the aroma of pot could once again be smelled throughout the arena. The crowd was getting ready to be tripped out by one of Canada's hottest bands.

The quartet took to the stage and began with their current single, "Automatic Flowers". The crowd was immediately behind them, singing the chorus. OLP was pumped and lead vocalist Raine Maida seemed to be in his zone, as he went from one song to the next. About a half hour into their set, Maida stopped for a minute and said "I think I forgot to ask, how are you guys doin' tonight?"

The band went back and forth from their two albums, *Naveed* and *Clumsy*, and even ventured into a cover of the Beatles' "Dear Prudence", transforming the song so that it could have easily been recorded on *Clumsy*.

The band performed "4am" and a



Blue Rodeo's Greg Keelor during one of his many solos on Friday night. (Photo by Ryan Lash)

new version of "Let You Down" that gave the show a more mellow tone. The crowd responded in kind as they brought out the lighters and swayed from side to side. These shifts in mood were transitions to allow the band to get prepped for the next high volume session.

At 10:30 the band said farewell, but everyone knew they were coming back — they hadn't played their big hit yet. They returned shortly and did one more tune before launching into "Clumsy". This was the song everyone wanted to hear. Unfortunately the piano didn't want to co-operate for the opening sequence. After a few failed attempts, the band recovered by using a guitar instead.

Our Lady Peace sold more albums

last year in Canada than any other musical act except the Spice Girls. They were able to do this without being a wholly mainstream radio band. They received most of their attention from Muchmusic and word-of-mouth.

Maida said in a recent interview in *Jam & Music* "...our focus for the next five weeks is putting on a definitive Our Lady Peace show in arenas where people have seen anyone from Pearl Jam to Oasis to U2. We want to make sure people leave there feeling like they saw something that was a little bit different. That's the challenge."

While the Metro Centre wasn't lucky enough to witness U2's *Popmart* tour, the OLP show was definitely different from the usual, and well worth the price of admission.

Blue Rodeo, government and the mainstream

Glenn Milchem
says whatever
the hell he likes

BY GREG MCFARLANE

For a man who claims to be just a drummer, Glenn Milchem has a lot to say.

Milchem has been drumming for the last seven years with one of Canada's most popular musical acts, Blue Rodeo.

Besides being proficient songwriters and musicians, the

band is also noted for its outspoken stand against social injustices. Milchem, although relatively unknown when compared to frontmen Jim Cuddy and Greg Keelor, is no exception.

"I have a general distrust of government," Milchem said from a hotel lobby in Saint John, New Brunswick. "If I had my way, there wouldn't be any countries, just small communities. For the most part, government is just lousy for the human race, individualism, and freedom. It promotes conformity."

The self-proclaimed anarchist and his bandmates use their position, and their record deal with Warner Bros.,

to express their views.

"Some would say that Blue Rodeo has sold out," Milchem said of the band's record deals with Warner in Canada and Sire in the US, "but we are allowed to express ourselves, and that's a valuable thing. People should be able to say whatever the hell they like, but you do need a big [record] company to reach people like we do."

Honesty is the ingredient that makes Blue Rodeo's message believable. There is no plastered-on image or conscious effort to attain widescale acceptance. The adage of 'what you see is what you get' applies to Blue Rodeo more than it does any other band. Possibly that is why

acceptance has fallen into their laps.

"Blue Rodeo is a common ground [for kids and adults]. I mean, my dad likes Blue Rodeo," said Milchem.

"Kids probably like it because it's not based on a novelty or a certain sound.

"Take Prodigy, for example. [Their music] is jazzy, and done really well, but it's not about songs. It's energetic dance music...it's contemporary. We're about songs with emotional content. We don't go out of our way to appeal [to the mainstream]."

However, upon consideration, it would appear that Blue Rodeo's time for mainstream success in the US has

come.

Our neighbours to the south are currently embracing a trend which has promoted the emergence of roots rock. Bands like the Jayhawks, Wilco and Son Volt are combining 60s Dylan frankness and country rock influences to create thoughtful, earnest songs.

That being said, Milchem still prefers to distance Blue Rodeo from the growing roots rock phenomenon.

"What [America] wants is fresh meat, and we're not [fresh meat]. We're Canadian...really Canadian, and we don't fit into the [roots] mold," said Milchem. "It'll take a fluke for us to get big in the States."