

Music

Keelaghan offers acoustic glimpse into history

Interview by Tracy Rowan

For a long, time folk balladeer James Keelaghan was one of Calgary's best kept secrets. That is, until his appearance at last summer's Edmonton Folk Music Festival won the crowd over with his exceptional style storytelling and compelling voice.

Since his successful festival season (he also played Regina, Calgary and London, Ont.), Keelaghan has been on a hectic touring schedule in support of his debut album, *Timelines*, released last September.

"The last six months have taken us (musicians Kathy Cook on mandolin/vocals and Bill Eaglesham on bass/vocals accompany Keelaghan) from Vancouver to St. John's," says Keelaghan from his hotel in Saskatoon.

The trio has been scoring big points on their frequent flyer plans by touring in three week spurts across the country, and they flew by helicopter from Churchill Falls to Labrador City, Newfoundland.

"We did six concerts in seven days and experiences a temperature change of 4°C to -46°C flying into Churchill Falls, which is about as remote as you can get," comments Keelaghan, who was enthusiastic about his Maritime jaunt. "We had a ball, it was almost like a vacation."

Touring so much has tightened Keelaghan's songwriting skills. "The sound keeps getting better. I'll throw out a chord pattern and they (Cook and Eaglesham) can pick up on it immediately," he says, discussing the creative process that often occurs in hotel rooms on the road. "We're writing and arranging at the same time now, which we couldn't do before" he adds.

Keelaghan's current repertoire includes songs about the Riel rebellion and Canada's largest mining disaster as well as "mishmash" of more current themes. His B.A. in History



James Keelaghan, folk balladeer, alone with his music.

serves him well in providing him with material.

While recognition in Alberta and Saskatchewan has been building steadily, Keelaghan has set his sights on greater musical exposure at the national level. "We've taped a couple of live performances in Winnipeg for the CBC FM radio programs 'Simply Folk' and 'Arts National'," he states.

Keelaghan also hints at the likelihood of a fall tour that will take the trio to Northeastern

United States. "We're starting to get some feedback. There's a rich market to be tapped there and we're on the edge of their folk consciousness" says Keelaghan, referring to his poignant "Jenny Bryce," a song which Garnet Rogers popularized in a 1986 recording.

Timelines, a genuine piece of work that offers an acoustic glimpse into history, features the background vocals of Spirit of the West (with whom Keelaghan has per-

formed), and it is now into its second pressing. "It means lugging along extra boxes (of albums) on tour for awhile," explains Keelaghan, "but they're emptied pretty fast."

Keelaghan's *Timelines* tour crosses paths with that of Stephen Fearing's "Out to Sea" tour ("we're good musical and personal friends" offers Keelaghan) this week at the Howlin' Wolf, with performances in the club March 22 and 23 and downstairs in the restaurant March 24.



Romantic triangles abound in film set in Czechoslovakia's sudden spring.

Film

Lightness of Being in 1968 Czechoslovakia

The Unbearable Lightness of Being
Orion Pictures
Westmount

review by Dragos Ruiu

"Take off your clothes," is the strident request of Tomas, a brain surgeon living in Prague in 1968, and the star of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. This amazingly successful, if clichéd, line is often followed by the mouthful kicker, "It's okay, I'm a doctor." And the amazing grace and beauty of Daniel Day Lewis' (Tomas) co-stars are enough to make

you reconsider med. school.

The Unbearable Lightness of Being is an art-film romance-epic after Czech author Milan Kundera's novel of the same name. It is, about life, death, and above all, love and sex. History buffs will note that Prague in 1968 rings a bell. Indeed, Prague is depicted as being a wonderful place to live in at that time.

Reform and openness were watchwords of the day in Czechoslovakia. Day by day, the freedoms in their society were growing. Laughter, rock and roll, and art flourished. In the words of one of Tomas' colleagues,

"What can the Russians do about it?" Life is great... until the tanks roll in.

Amidst all this are the chronicles of Tomas, the consummate womanizer. With a reptilian James Dean look, he makes women melt before him. Hopping from bed to bed, he leads an idyllic, if anything but boring life.

The lovely Lena Olin plays Sabina, Tomas' consistent support. Fetchingly clad in her hat and stockings, she is Tomas' counterpart in life. Sabina is terrified of closeness and intimacy, and she bugs out when things get messy. They are made for each other.

Things are fine until Tomas falls madly in

love with the shy, dependent, and very pretty Tereza (Juliette Binoche) from a small spa town. Tereza reciprocates but never becomes accustomed to Tomas' recreational "flings."

This is rarely a shallow film. The director, Phil Kaufman (*The Right Stuff*), has a subtle touch. In true art-film fashion, foreshadowing is present from the beginning. The imagery and scenes are lush.

Particularly well done are the news reel amalgams depicting the rude entry of the tanks into Prague, and the subsequent discovery of Tereza's career as a photographer. Placing herself in danger, she busily snaps breath-taking photos, chronicling the entrance of Russian despots.

This is a film that evokes strong emotions. Hate builds for the troll-like KGB/GRU, and empathy for the Czechs who are given a brief taste of freedom and are promptly stifled.

Like art-films of a decade past, the film treats eroticism frankly and openly. Nudity is not scorned, and isn't exploited. Sex is treated naturally with a frank, electric depiction. The torrid bedroom scenes and the stunningly seductive photo session between Sabina and Tereza are some of the most convincing ever shot.

But other aspects of this film fail. The English actors portraying foreign languages with corny, put-on accents add a ridiculousness to the otherwise impeccable atmosphere. Despite the picturesque period sets, an occasional anachronism sneaks in, like Tereza loading a shiny DX encoded Kodak film canister into her ancient Praktica TTL.

And at a running time of two hours and 47 minutes, there are points when the film lulls and you begin to wonder why certain scenes were included. But the film does maintain a sense of rhythm, and the boring parts are soon offset by interesting ones.

In the age of videos, and the quick edit/high content scene, this film's slow relaxed style stands out. It is very reminiscent of *A Room With a View* (in which Daniel Day Lewis also acted). This American (!) film is definitely not adolescent, and Sylvester Stallone or Golan & Globus would avoid it like the plague. That's a point in its favour.

This movie is a thorough character study, and will fascinate some just as it will bore others. But it is well worth seeing, for movies as picturesque as this are a rare breed.