



ENTERTAINMENT

The Rankin Family - Staying Close To Traditions



The Rankin Family brave the winter weather to visit town

Photo by Warren Watson

by Murray Thorpe
Brunswickan Entertainment

"And step outta line with reality. That's the way it should be." These may seem like the words of David Gilmour, but instead, they belong to the Rankin Family who may be trying to reach a wider audience than they have in the past with mostly traditional gaelic music. Their past is no small accomplishment as their first three albums have sold over a million copies in Canada. They are currently touring in support of their fourth album, *Endless Seasons* and were in Fredericton at the Aitken Centre, Saturday, December 12. They are on their way home to the coastal village of Mabou in the western highlands of Cape Breton's Inverness County for Christmas.

The Rankin family performers are just five of twelve children born to Kaye Rankin and her late husband, Buddy over a span of thirteen years. Music has always been a part of their lives and over the years, nine of the twelve children used to sing at weddings. The current five performers are John Morris (36), Raylene (35), Jimmy (31), Cookie, whose real name is Carol Jean (30) and Heather (28). Only Cookie and Heather are unmarried and John Morris, with a daughter and a son, is

the only one of the five to have any children. It was in 1989 that they changed their name from the "Mabou Jig" and released their self titled album, *The Rankin Family*.

The children are seventh generation descendants of their Scottish ancestors fleeing the infamous Highland clearances, during which highland farms were summarily seized, tenants expelled and then used for sheep herding. This was all due to the lands being declared unfit for habitation. Song writing, which the Rankins and especially Jimmy do, tends to be influenced by not only the person's past, including ancestral past, but also by the person's surroundings. Both these themes can be found in their music.

Gaelic, the language of the Scots, was outlawed when the British took over Scotland, but still influences the music of the Rankins. Their recent album has only one song entirely in gaelic but there are a couple of other traditional songs in English. The rest of the album consists of country and contemporary songs.

One contemporary song, 'Your Boat's Lost At Sea', reflects their Maritime upbringing. This song was magnificently sung during the concert by Jimmy Rankin. Although his voice is not D'Arcy Broderick's (of the Irish

Descendants), I enjoyed it and was surprised to read Anne Ingram's comments, in the Daily Gleaner of December 11, on Jimmy as "... being a fine song writer but his vocal skills leave a lot to be desired." I have, on a couple of occasions, been disappointed by live performances not living up to expectations but this was not the case Saturday night. I would have liked to have heard a couple more songs sung by Jimmy. The voices of his sisters, of course, would have still stolen the show. The sisters were excellent in their harmonizing which they say is because their voices are so close.

One of their upbeat songs, 'You Feel The Same Way Too', is currently being played on NCN and has the line quoted at the beginning of this article. Jimmy Rankin, in his interview, said they wanted this song to have a Cajun feel, however, instead of having an accordion in the song, a fiddle was used.

The crowd was clapping throughout the night, and, on occasion, especially during 'You Feel The Same Way Too', people were dancing in front of the stage. John Morris, rarely standing at the front of the stage, spiced up the live version of this song by running his hands up and down the 88 keys. This song was played early in the concert and the

mood it created did not wane over the course of the night. The concert ended with the final encore being, 'Fare Thee Well Love'. This song was accompanied by some fans by slowly waving their lighters above their heads which was suggested to them by the back-up guitar player who was waving a small light.

Jimmy does not want to be called strictly a country band but did not mind being NCN's (TV's New Country Network) artist of the month this past November. Awards are not new to this

band. On their first three albums, they have received Juno awards, East Coast Music Association (ECMA) awards, and Canadian Country Music Association (CCMA) awards.

Their success has come without selling out to the commercial side of music. This is a luxury they have had because they all have at least a Bachelor's degree in Arts. Raylene has a Law degree. Even with all of their success, they will probably never ignore the traditional music that they all love.



Meet the Rankins: (from left to right) Raylene, Jimmy, Heather, Cookie and John Morris