

ARTS

First class artist still waiting to be discovered

Don Freed
Centennial Library Theatre
January 29

review by Jens Andersen

If there is a just and benevolent God in heaven above, it is hard to say why Don Freed doesn't regularly sell out larger concert halls (the small Library Theatre was only half filled for his show Friday), or why songs like "Topeka Ponoka Tapioca Polka" and "Uranium" aren't on the charts, or why he still hasn't got a recording contract for his second album yet.

As he demonstrated once again at his solo concert, Freed is an adroit wordsmith, a tuneful composer, a clean and precise guitar and harmonica player, and a man whose sharp eye and fine sense of the comic and poignant give rise to some really first-rate material.

The two gems from the concert that stand out most in my mind are "Old People In the Snow," a song requested by a member of the audience, and "Turn On the Positive," which he used to finish the show.

The former is a haunting song about elderly folks tottering gingerly down the slippery winter streets of downtown Toronto. What lifts it above the level of just another tear-jerker about growing old is, first, Freed's imagery - his conjuring up of "the tightrope of ice" that these old people walk, and his mimicking of the younger pedestrians who regard them merely as annoying obstacles ("Why don't they dry up and blow away") and, secondly, the touch of wry humor he puts into the song. For instance, he recites these lines:

Old people cherish grip
They can't afford to slip

and then follows this with a barely audible whistle, of the kind one hears in cartoons when someone plummets to the bottom of a canyon.

With anyone else this would simply be a joke in extremely bad taste, but with Freed it somehow accentuates the evocative sadness of the song. I suspect the reason is the music, a simple melody set to a



I'll have a drink-a and a toke-a/ then I'll polka/ around Ponoka!

painfully slow quadruple time beat, that holds the song together and anchors it in a mood of profound and unrelenting weariness.

"Turn On the Positive" is similarly moody, and I would give you some details about it except that I was too busy hanging my jaw in wonder at its austere beauty to

take any notes. Suffice it to say it affected me the same way as stories like Sherwood Anderson's "Sophistication" and Ruth Suckow's "Just Him and Her," stories which penetrate to the heart of life and transmit an overwhelming feeling of its meaninglessness and tragedy.

Most of Freed's other songs are only a little less inspired. As I hinted before, "Uranium" and "Topeka Ponoka Tapioca Polka" really deserve to be on the charts. They are bouncy and just busting with vitality; a person would have to be deaf or dead to avoid resonating to them. Ditto for "Going to Vi's for Lunch" ('cause I don't wanna eat flies for lunch)," a paean to that restaurant and a hatchet job on certain others.

Nor should we forget "Real Estate," in which he calls attention to high land prices with a bit of typical Freedian hyperbole:

Went to the store
to pick up a shirt
Paid for the sucker
with a pocketful of dirt

A few of Freed's songs are rather unexceptional, like his song about breaking up, "John Spills the Beans to Marsha," and occasionally his vocalizing is a bit exaggerated and strained, but what the hell, it is a small price to pay for the swell stuff.

It should also be noted that Freed is a consummate showman, as when he told the audience that he was taping "Turn On the Positive" to send to fellow singer Jim Post, and got them to chant in unison, "Hello Jim, How's it going?" as an introduction to the song.

Or when he walked onstage at the beginning of the show and said, "Now I want you to applaud real loud at the end of this song, so they can hear you all the way over at the Alan Stivell concert."

Well, applaud they did, and not just for the first song either. Hopefully somebody somewhere in the music business will hear it too, and that second record will somehow become a reality.

ESO runs hot and cold

Edmonton Symphony Orchestra
Jubilee Auditorium
January 27 and 29

review by Beth Jacob

The ESO presented two concerts from two different series last week that provided a startling study in contrast. Wednesday's concert, the opening one in the Great Composer's Series was the best I've heard the symphony play this term. Friday's concert, "An Evening in Vienna", part of the Sunwapta Pops Series, was, for myself at least, less of a concert than an endurance test.

Wednesday's program consisted of Schubert's "Symphony No. 8 (Unfinished)", Paganini's "Violin Concerto No. 2" and Beethoven's "Symphony No. 5". Uri Mayer was conducting, his first appearance here this month, and the orchestra responded to his leadership with a strong performance.

The Schubert was restrained and controlled, quietly lyrical throughout, with solid brass playing and nice solos from all of the woodwinds. The Beethoven was full of energy and verve, again sure and together. Despite the familiarity of the work, Mayer managed, particularly through his choice of tempi, to put his own stamp on the piece.

The highlight of the evening was the Paganini, played expertly by guest artist Eugene Fodor. The finale "La Campanella"

The second part of the Hollywood feature is done (Scout's Honor!) but space considerations preclude printing it before Thursday, when *Up and Coming* will also appear (look for Doc Watson coming to SUB Theatre this weekend). Blame the delay on the student politicians, who would have exploded from internal pressure it we hadn't let them vent a little gas in the centerspread.

J.A.

sums up the piece, running the gamut of virtuoso technique, including double stop harmonics and left hand pizzicato. Fodor faultlessly executed the technical demands of the piece with a rich full tone and flawless musicianship. The audience responded to such virtuosity with a standing ovation and were rewarded with two encores, A Bach Preludio and a 20th century ballad, which demonstrated his interpretive abilities in music with more substance than the Paganini.

It hardly seemed like the same group of musicians on stage Friday night. I have always had a problem with the concept of a "Pop" series. To me, it seems like deciding to drink wine instead of beer, then going out and buying a bottle of Baby Duck. Friday's concert had all the bouquet of a bottle of Donini.

The program was a grabbag of songs (performed by Colette Boky and Mark DuBois), and assorted waltzes and polkas by Strauss, Lehar and a few minor composers. The singers were adequate and I could have put up with the oom pah pah ad nauseum except for the fact that the entire proceedings reeked of poor taste, best summed up by one word: Schmalz.

From the garishly ridiculous, pseudo rockband Sunwapta Pops sign suspended over the stage, through to the cutesy tin whistle polka and the endless solo violin passages with Mr. Keene wandering around the stage (perhaps in search of some stray diners?) the concert moved from embarrassingly coy to out-and-out bad.

The last straw came when during an instrumental interlude in one duet the two singers began to waltz across the stage. Ugh! Sheer fortitude and years of training in concert etiquette kept me in my seat for 53 long minutes until the first intermission. Nothing could have made me return to suffer through the second half. Concerts like that could put anyone off classical music for life.

DIRECT DRIVE

by James Stevens

Tomorrow
The Battery
Rio Records (Rio 1019)

The Battery are a five man unit based in Halifax that offer three very distinct styles of music in this one album. The first side starts out with "In It Together" and "Another Man", both of which showcase a raw-sounding and often blistering saxophone. I found this to be a real ear opener and felt that the sax made these cuts two of the better ones on the album. The Battery follows with a rollicking "Route 66", which is then followed by "Inverness Beach". The latter cut nearly shuts the eyes and almost de-powers the stereo. It is a deadening instrumental with a life factor of zero. Side one is closed with the title track, a harmless foot-stomper type tune with "nice" vocals and back-ups.

Side two starts off with a rockified version of the old blues number "Dust My Broom." Although it is different in style than side one, this cut is compatible and shows that the band is capable of more than one type of music. The album then plunges into the depths of soft rock mush. I should have taken the album off after the first song on this side. This change in direction is a very big detraction in the overall impression I got from the album. All of the tunes should have remained in the vein of side one, as the last three songs on side two are neither interesting nor compatible with the previous side of the album. Technically, *Tomorrow* is a well-recorded album with few blatant flaws (other than the sorry change in tone on side two) and The Battery show signs of being worth a listen if they stuck to the formula on side one of the album.

Empty Handed
Jet
(Thirdcoast Records) A & M TA-2210

It's three in the morning, you're all shagged out from the party you've just had, but you still have some late night giv'er types that just don't want to leave so that you may pass away quietly. My suggestion is to throw on *Empty Handed* by Jet and turn your stereo up loud. I can assure you that you will be a lonesome person by the end of the second song.

The music on this album is recycled middle-of-the-road rock that I've heard on a hundred albums before. Nothing of much interest or originality is presented to the listener. On top of this, I found the vocals to be highly irritating. We are told nothing about the band on the album cover, so the vocalist, a female, remains anonymous, which I figure is just as well. The first cut on side one, "Night, Night, Night", is not a completely lost cause, although I would have preferred it without the vocals. It is followed by the song "Love Slave", a particularly uninspiring tune with the chorus "I wanna be your love slave, baby/I wanna dance all over your skin." Oh boy, sounds like fun! I can hardly wait for it to come true.

Jet continues to present the listener with little more than humdrum music and with a lot more tepid lyrics.

As the album plays on, Jet continues to present the listener with little more than humdrum music and with a lot more tepid lyrics. When I consider their type of music coupled with their grating vocals, I come up with a big fat zero (which is actually on the album cover) for the effort. My reaction is not 100% negative, though. I thought that the album title was more than appropriate.

