

## Music

## Blues and folk man, Ken Hamm

**Floodtide**  
Ken Hamm  
North Track

**Interview and review by Randal Smathers**  
Students should be able to identify with Ken Hamm. After all, he spends his summers tree-planting to pay for his winter activities. In his case he's not studying, but singing.

Hamm's music is hard to categorize, but falls within the general realm of blues/folk.

"I think the blues label makes it easier for promoters to sell tickets," said Hamm. "About half of what I do is blues, but I like a lot of other kinds of music, and I think those other influences come in in my own writing." On *Floodtide*, Hamm covers such blues masters as Willie Dixon, Bo Diddley, and Howlin' Wolf. His own compositions run more towards folk.

While his backup band are talented, they don't really rock out on the blues numbers, remaining more restrained than one would expect, especially on tunes like "Who Do You Love".

While this is not necessarily a fault, it certainly takes some adjustment. The band sounds much more comfortable with the rest of the music on the album.

Hamm named John Hammond and sixties folk music in general as influences on his music, and the sound reminded me of Dave Van Ronk.

*Floodtide* was recorded partially live, at a place called Marty's Cafe in Calgary, and partially in a studio.

"I wanted to try both," said Hamm. "I know things happen when you play live that you never can get when you play in studio, and I think we were quite successful in getting that feel." However, Hamm also noted that "the more intimate things" worked best in the studio.

Hamm, a resident of Cedar, BC, regularly tours through central BC, with swings through Edmonton and Calgary, and points east. "I don't find the Vancouver scene that friendly," he said.

One change from the album will be the size of Hamm's group. Instead of the four musicians who were used for most of the record, Hamm will be performing with one sideman, Bruce Everett. Everett contributes vocals, harmonicas, flute and panpipe to Hamm's guitar and vocals.

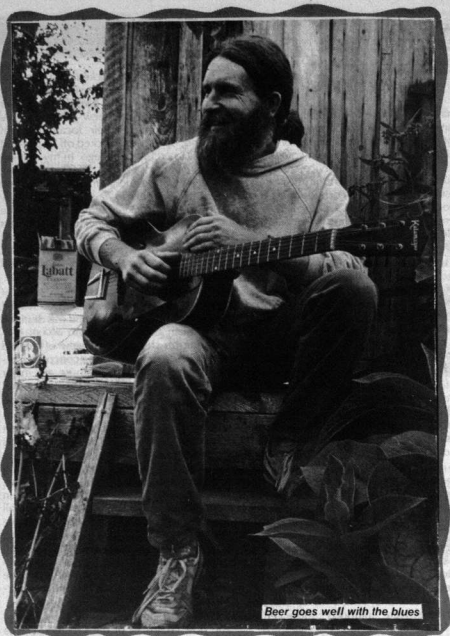
"I'd love to have a group on the road all the time, but there's just not enough work," Hamm also prefers playing concerts to bars. He finds that his "more intimate and personal work" doesn't come across in bars, although the blues material does.

Hamm will be bringing his mix of music to the South Side Folk Club on Saturday, March 26. It's been a while since he played in Edmonton, since the Folkfest conflicts with tree-planting, but he has played the Track a few times, and people with good memories may remember him.

He concluded that "eventually the entire population will end up at Postage and Main." His trio also includes Kathy Cook (mandolin and vocals) and Bill Eaglesham (bass and vocals).

Kealaghan's program included mostly familiar material from his *Timelines* album and was highlighted by the polished vocal arrangements on such songs as "The Fires of Calais," "Lost," and "Roll Down".

Also memorable was Kealaghan's moving rendition of "Jenny Bryce". You can still catch this really enjoyable double bill at the Howlin' Wolf downstairs tonight as Ian Tyson takes over in the club.



Beer goes well with the blues

## Double bill of folk at Howlin' Wolf

**Stephen Fearing/James Kealaghan**  
Howlin' Wolf  
March 22-24

review by Tracy Rowan

A relatively small but appreciative audience was treated to a "marathon" performance given by two of Western Canada's most promising

### Book

## Chinese Lives of contemporary history retold

**Chinese Lives: An Oral History of Contemporary China**  
by Zhang Xinxin and Sang Ye  
Irwin Publishing

review by Don Tremblay

Chinese Lives' old women's lives, widow's lives, bandits' lives, prostitutes' lives, young boys' lives, Red Guards' lives, bitter couples' lives... all are Chinese lives, and all are documented in this splendid book.

Walk through the underground railway stations and the streets of Beijing with a thirteen year old popcorn salesman, China's Huck Finn. Peddle alongside a mailwoman who rides the hilly streets to deliver the morning mail, only to return to her post when she finishes to pick up some more.

"Mao had the look of a real emperor, but he was better than an emperor."

Suffer the frustration and pressure that befalls Fu Yawen, an eighteen year old who is preparing again for the very difficult college entrance exams.

In all, sixty-four colorful, depressing, hopeful, and sordid sketches of Chinese people based on interviews have been compiled and presented here by the duo of Xinxin and Ye.

Inspired by the oral history books of Studs Terkel *Working and American Dreams: Lost and Found*, the two writers contrived the

singer-songwriters in the contemporary folk genre on Tuesday night at the Howlin' Wolf.

Fearing, up first, captivated the crowd with his smooth guitar stylings and rich voice on a number of acoustic offerings from his recent *Out to Sea*. LP, a well as others from a seemingly large repertoire.

Fearing easily moved from the familiar riffs of Joni Mitchell's "Clouds" to the more traditional ("Dublin Bay") and to the more

bluesy current material. "Welfare Wednesday" proved to be especially intriguing with its subject of being caught in the welfare system's undertow.

James Kealaghan kicked off the second set with his trademark storytelling introductions to give the attentive crowd a proper perspective in which to place his ballads. Especially entertaining was his trio's theory pertaining to the demographic shift of Canadian workers between Alberta and Ontario (both

idea in 1984 and began travelling "around China interviewing people to form a composite picture of the modern descendant of the Peking Man of half a million years ago." Xinxin is a controversial fiction writer and journalist. Ye is a respected journalist and columnist.

Modern descendants who, over the course of the last sixty or so years, have endured war with Japan, civil war, a communist takeover, collectivization, the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution.

Everyone interviewed by Xinxin and Ye was affected by one or all of these events. The Great Leap Forward in 1958, a plan that was intended to modernize China, resulted in a disastrous famine "that is now admitted to have caused many millions of deaths." So did the Cultural Revolution. But it also uprooted many young people and set their lives in directions in which they did not want to go.

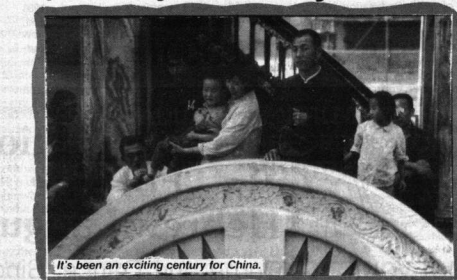
At the same time, however, the Cultural Revolution made life very enjoyable for the ardent believers in communism. Thus, not everyone's life was negatively changed, although everyone was affected.

Everyone is affected, still. Just ask "Mr. Average" Jhao Pingguang, a twenty-two year old steel mill worker who bitterly blames the Cultural Revolution for depriving him of an education: "(It) screwed me up when I was a kid, but that's just how it was: 'All power to the proletariat.'"

The naturalness of Pingguang's language here reveals the superbly simple yet vividly clear style that both writers employ in transferring their interviews to written form. Each selection is preceded by a title ("Mr. Average") and a very brief introduction.

Then, for three or four pages, the interviewee tells his, her, or their compelling story.

Xinxin and Ye, in reproducing a story, do



not enhance the tale with flowery adjectives or colorful metaphors. They simply re-tell the story in its original language and style. For these selections are not intended to be lyrical tales of prose; rather, they are to represent the stark reality of life in China.

Take, for example, the woman in "Her Past" who "didn't want us to publish her name." She was sold by her father as a maid when she was thirteen, raped by her landlord when she was fourteen, and later in the same year, was sold to a brothel: "For the first three days I didn't have to receive any clients. They were waiting for someone who was prepared to pay a lot for the first time. My first client was a young gentleman and he gave me a terrible beating."

Zhang Yuxi, in "Land", reveals his adoration for Chairman Mao: "Chairman Mao had wealth and greatness written all over his face. He had the look of a real emperor, but he was better than an emperor. No emperor

saved the poor. Chairman Mao was the saviour of the poor from the moment he was born. If he hadn't been, would we be missing him now?"

The selections are divided into seventeen parts, each of which are also titled to indicate the theme that unites them. The themes covered include "Workers"; "Crime and Punishment"; "Handicaps"; and "State of Marriage." This virtually every area of Chinese life is covered. One section, "Show Business", relates to lives in the entertainment world. Another, "Ways Up", concerns the lives of young people trying to develop a foundation upon which to base their future.

The book is called *Chinese Lives* and the book gives you Chinese lives. Words from the mouths of the people themselves tell the stories; Xinxin and Ye brilliantly bind them together to form their book. Anyone remotely interested should read it, because it is very good.