

Ralph's guitar waltz



Elliott Lefko

There are some musicians who enjoy giving interviews, and there are others who would rather head in the opposite direction. The music does the talking, they figure, and besides it becomes difficult trying to explain their art in words.

After a concert, Ralph Towner is one musician who would

rather spend time with young guitarists, comparing notes, visit an old friend, or speak to the local musicians who opened the show.

After a persistent shadow, I did manage to capture his attention. We sat on the wings of a small backstage in the NDWT Theatre. In the darkly lit room, he lit cigarettes, drank from a short glass of wine, had a bit of the last

beer and spoke of the solo performance he had just given, his first in Toronto.

"Toronto is known. It's a good town from the musicians who have come out of it. But it's nothing compared to Montreal in terms of shows. They've got a scene—promoters, clubs. As part of the ensemble Oregon, we recorded part of our last album there."

"I enjoyed playing here, but I didn't feel my performance was good. I was beating back the hysteria. My best moments, I felt, were a couple of times when I played just one note."

Towner is a respected guitarist whose work has been featured on records with his friend John Abercrombie, Oregon, and his solo works. Most of his work is featured on ECM Records. Although some people have criticized Manfred Eicher's German-based label for its arrogance, Towner, like Abercrombie, had only kind words for the super engineer.

"What company would release a ten record set, such as the Keith Jarrett series of last year? I'm not going to get involved with criticizing ECM. The criticism is superficial, peripheral to the music. I work for ECM because I like the musicians on the label. But it's not a closed 'stable', I can also bring in people who aren't on ECM for an album."

"I release about a record a year. I need that much time to prepare. Keith Jarrett is prolific. The function of the ten record set, and I could release one if I wanted to, is to document his work as a whole. Not to say that this record is better than that one. He is extraordinary because he won't repeat himself in those ten records."

Breaking up his years with concerts, Towner visits Europe more than the U.S. and Canada. He enjoys playing and once he has gotten his guitar in the door of a town, he'll usually come back. After 15 years of playing, 10 with Oregon, he finds that audiences are growing, and becoming more receptive to Towner and Oregon's East-West musical-mix. Above all he finds that the music is constantly getting better. "And that's what it's all about. Why play unless you can get better?"

Playing solo guitar before an audience is demanding. Unlike the piano, a guitar can sound repetitious awfully fast. "Audiences are so instinctive," marvels Towner. "They're like nerve endings. The more I bury them with notes, the more monotonous it becomes."

Over the course of his one hour set, Towner entertained his audience with some improvisa-

tion, a couple of tunes from Abercrombie ("He wrote 'Ralph's Piano Waltz' on piano, while housekeeping my apartment"), and some originals. One pretty composition was "The Silence of the Candle." It is Towner's interpretation of poetry.

"I had a neighbour who wrote poetry and asked me to write music to the words. However, I didn't like them, so I wrote my own."

"It was a catharsis. I needed it at that point in my life, to express what it was in me. I couldn't do that with music."

"I set the poems to music, and then dumped the words. The song became unusually lyrical. It was like what John Hendricks used to do."

With that high note, we stop. Towner bums a ride to his hotel, and another interview is over. Now, you see, Ralph, that didn't hurt a bit.

Demented Yak

Reader David Lavin wins the Instructions elpee (Quality Records) for suggesting that we have Rod "I sound quite toad-like" Stewart "walk into the Edge during a Forgotten Rebels concert." Bertrand Russell'd love ya, David. This week: who goes "Arf! Arf!" when he laughs? Hint: a legendary American sailor with a

skinny girlfriend. Sickeningly easy. Get your drunken scrawls to Excalibur, Yak, 111 Central Square, and if your correct entry is drawn you get a freebie of the Thomas Luke Phobia novel of the John Huston film. Excalibur staff must stay at home with their iguanas and mutter sweet nothings. S.R.

Gourmet folk

The Mariposa Folk Festival returns with a vengeance. This Friday and Saturday at 8:30 at Harbourfront the ancient festival will take on a new youthful appearance. Gone is the 3-day-long affair, in its place is a sleek two-nighter, divided into a blues night and a folk night. Representing the blues on Friday will be the Downchild Blues Band, and the "two giants of the blues" Johnny Shines, and Robert Jr. Lockwood, plus some surprised guests.

On Saturday, David Bromberg, "a master of the folk guitar" will be joined by Sweet Honey In The Rock, Robert Paquette, Pepe Castillo, and Estampa Criolla, for

an evening of delicious folk. Further Info. 363-4009. Tickets from 598-2838. The music never sounded better.



Council of the York Student Federation is accepting nominations for
PRESIDENT
V.P. INTERNAL
V.P. EXTERNAL

Nominations are open until October 7, 1980

Forms are available in Rm. 105 Central Square

Robert Steadman
Chief Returning Officer

Beverly Hill Coin Laundry

TRY A COIN LAUNDRY FOR ALL REASONS

- wash anything up to 50 lbs.
- easy parking, pleasant surroundings
- OPEN 7 days/week 8:30 a.m.—10 p.m.

BEHIND YORK PLAZA AT JANE & WILSON

Phone 245-9074

Bring this ad for a 25¢ reduction on each washing machine used.

What to do with an empty Blue.



When you're smiling, call for Labatt's Blue.