

in concert



Van Morrison

Photo by Steve Tweed

Morrison's music shines, but audience rapport nil

I guess love means you never have to say you're sorry, in the case of Van Morrison and his special Valentine's Day concert at Mac Court last Thursday night.

The blondish-red haired Belfast cowboy was playing well, doing a lot of his old things like "Ballerina," from the "Astral Weeks" album, and a real golden oldie, "Brown Eyed Girl."

Dressed in a white sport-shirt and blue jeans, Morrison's stage presence, even though the music was good, was barely felt. After two lengthy numbers by the Caledonia Express, Morrison joined in opening the set with a jaunt to the past, a mellow version of "Ballerina."

From the beginning notes of "Ballerina" to the encores of "Wild Night" and "Domino," not a word was spoken by Morrison, who appeared to be suffering from a lack of personality and balls.

"That's just the way Van is," said Stephen Pillster, Morrison's manager. "He is a man of few words. He's not what I'd want to call another Bob Hope, and like, he's not filled with a lot of clever conversation." And as I found out over dinner that evening, Van really doesn't have much to say, other than what's in his tunes.

One thing I did find out during the process of pulling teeth was that there are several things Van has in the can that haven't made it on vinyl. In layman's terms, Morrison has a lot of unrecorded material which he hasn't had the opportunity to release on record. One such tape, "Caledonia Soul," recorded several years ago in the studio in California, is an excellent example of what can be expected someday if he ever cuts it loose. As it stands, a studio tape of "Caledonia" is around, and in one instance, up until six months ago, was being aired on a Portland FM station.

The magic and sensation of the legendary Van Morrison was never in the concert or at the dinner table that evening. To make things a bit clearer, one must look at the show in perspective: with close to two hours of good music from Van Morrison, little if any feeling or effort to communicate with the audience ever appeared. Entertainers who care very little for their audiences, and show it, can just shove it as far as I'm concerned, Van Morrison included.

The crowd waited 20 minutes past show time (9:20 p.m.) outside of the court before being allowed entrance to the hall. I was told that several Morrison people had dispersed among the crowd to tell them what was going on. I saw none of them. No explanation other than "there were hassles" ever surfaced.

The gist of the problem stemmed from several "hassles," namely, a late sound check, problems in getting electricity to the stage, and the fact that the University basketball team had practiced till 7 p.m. that evening. The team left promptly when its time for the court had elapsed, and should not be blamed for the lateness in the show. Usually the sound equipment is set up in advance and checked, which didn't happen Thursday. Nevertheless, the show went on.

Overlooking Morrison's attitude and composure, I must admit the musicianship was excellent. Who can deny Van Morrison his title as the only White to really know how to sing the blues? His sax solo during Ray Charles' "I Believe To My Soul" was well above par and well received. And the Caledonia Express (or the Orchestra, whatever you wish)... whew! They were so powerful and funky that I was afraid Van was going to be cooked right off the stage. The keyboards of James Trummell were quite tasty as were the guitar licks of Ralph Walsh, all highlighted by the sax of Charlie McCarthy and rounded out by the deep down drive of the bass by David Hayes, and the slick drumming of David Shaw.

By the time Morrison had gotten to his old standard "Gloria" (the real set rocker), people were on their feet and dancing, which lasted through three encore numbers.

Opening the show for Morrison was an excellent Marin County band, Clover, who played one hell of a soulful set. The opening icebreaker was laid back, but from then on, all hell broke loose. "Cookin'," "Chicken Butt," and "Peaches Tree" provided room to move, and certainly broke the ice for Van Morrison. Clover is definitely a band to watch as a followup to a diversified Tower of Power-Elvin Bishop sound.

Not much else can be said about the show — it was all said by Morrison. After two calls for encores, there was reason to believe many of the persons attending had enjoyed themselves. Yet, at the same time, it was also evident that Van Morrison couldn't have given shit or shinola about Valentine's Day or Eugene, Oregon. I guess it's all a question of whether a crowd wants to fork out the cash to hear a pale zombie play some good music.

Greg G. Lee



Morrison played acoustic guitar (above) and sax as well as singing at his concert last Thursday night in Mac Court.

Photo by Steve Tweed

drama

"Just come in, sit down, get totally relaxed, and don't expect a conventional theatrical experience."

Joseph Gilg, who shares directorial duties with Frank Kelly in Arena Theater's production of "An Evening With Samuel Beckett," sees nothing but hasslement in the conceptual baggage which some theatergoers may feel obligated to bring to a theatrical treatment of the Irish author's work. He and Kelly view the production, which opens Friday, as a piece of "total theater" which exceeds the bounds of theatrical or literary experience, possessing tonic properties for the heart and the senses as well as the mind. Their emphasis is clear: Be open. Leave your learning at home for an evening.

The show comprises roughly a dozen pieces from the Beckett oeuvre, ranging from excerpts from the celebrated *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* and passages from the novels *Malloy* and *How It Is*, to the reductionist experiments which have come to characterize Beckett's work in the last decade or so. Because of the brevity of the latter, four complete recent plays are among the pieces featured: "Play," "Act

Without Words II," "Come and Go," and "The Old Tune," which Beckett adapted from French dramatist Robert Pingot.

Kelly and Gilg collaborated on the show's initial conception, selecting the material and more or less arbitrarily dividing labor, with each taking entire responsibility for certain excerpts. The sharing of duties makes the task of rendering Beckett's varied material less formidable, they explain, and on the whole more stimulating. "It's interesting to have a diversity of viewpoint," says Kelly. "Ideally, one piece would be directed by one director."

"An Evening With Samuel Beckett" will be performed at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Feb. 28, and March 1 and 2. Tickets are \$1.50 each for adults and 75 cents for students with student body cards. They are available at the University Theatre box office (686-4191), open from noon to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and until 9 p.m. on performance nights.

Chris Hougum

rock on

It's kind of interesting to watch the musical trends that spread across the country. One of the funny little quirks that keep record promotion men up until all hours of the night is why acts are received so differently in areas of the country.

Since Tower of Power will be here next weekend, it might be interesting to take a look at the problem they are faced with. Their problem is that they are one of the biggest name bands on the west coast, but their popularity on the east coast is just nominal.

Why, with a sound that is definitely urban-based, are they less popular in the biggest urban areas of the country? The reason given by the band's management is that they don't get the chance to play many club dates in the east. They are in and out for one-nighters and don't hang around to gain the kind of appeal they would have if they'd play extended engagements at clubs. But that could be refuted by noting their popularity here in Eugene and the fact that they have never played a club date here. Another reason for the lack of popularity in the east is the lack of FM airplay. Tower gets almost all

of its air time on the east coast on Top 20 stations and they need to get more play of album cuts to bring up their popularity.

Ron Varnett, the group's manager, says their main objective in 1974 will be to try to bring the popular acceptance the group has received on the west coast to the east.

At any rate, that really isn't our concern. I hope they make it, but I just hope they keep playing in Eugene since last March when they sold out a concert at the Lane County Fairgrounds. Needless to say, Mac Court should be quite a bit more pleasant place to watch and listen to Tower of Power.

In the aftermath of the Van Morrison concert, we have finally convinced the populous and the local officials that we can indeed have a "rock" concert in Mac Court without the problems that plagued concerts there for years.

The Eugene Fire Department official who was at the concert told me he thought there was less smoking at the concert than at basketball games. And why? Why after so long and so many problems have we

been able to convince concert goers to forego smoking?

I have some ideas of my own. First, I think people realized that if they wanted to see top flight entertainment in Eugene, they would have to see it at Mac Court, for Mac Court, despite all its sound and seating problems, is the only facility we have in this town that's big enough to allow us to put on big name shows. Second, I think people were aware that the situation was critical and were prone to try to keep the smoking down than they were in past years.

Whatever the reason, the crowd at the Morrison show should be congratulated for its cooperation.

I can only hope that we will not let ourselves become complacent and let the situation get out of hand again. We now have Mac Court because everyone tried to do just a little, just their share. But let's not forget the troubles we have encountered during the past three years and fall into the same problems that originally kept us out of the court.

Bruce Micklus

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