

# Slow Buck performs to fit the mood

By GLEN OZONWOOD  
Of the Emerald

Honesty is a positive thing. It causes one to smile and helps make the music of Slow Buck enjoyable. The five-member, local band obviously enjoys what it's doing and sincerely reacts to an audience that reacts to it.

In its present incarnation, Slow Buck has been playing since February, although the band formed in September of 1976. There were personnel changes in January, and one result of the shuffle was Rick Johnson, lead-guitar and reed player.

Johnson grew up in the Bay Area and says his playing was most influenced by Jerry Garcia of the Grateful Dead and John Cipollina of Quicksilver. Johnson says Cipollina has a unique style.

"He plays with finger picks instead of a pick, which gives him more of a classically-oriented sound. Then he uses a little vibrato-tremolo arm."

Johnson studies music a lot and has more musical knowledge than the others in the band.

"But I don't want to be a centralized point. I want the group to be varied; that's the advantage of the violin. There's a lot of music happening and it's nice to have that ping-pong kind of thing."

The violin, or more accurately the fiddle, is played by Michael Kane. Kane sits in with a local bluegrass group, The Whiskey Creek String Band, and says he plays by ear. His style is different than Johnson's, but rhythm guitarist Tom Sobieski says the two are striking a balance, learning from each other.

"Michael will play something he's heard and Rick has the facility to mimic him and pick up on it real quick." But the exchange is not one-sided. Kane benefits from Johnson's studying.

"You're definitely limited playing by ear. You only hear certain things."

Improvisation is important to the band. Sobieski writes about three-quarters of the band's original tunes and says pieces written for Slow Buck are open-ended and roomy.

"Ultimately the tunes are finished by the band. I have the words, melody and the chords, but after that it's up to each individual."

Sobieski wrote most of his songs to perform himself, but the last couple have been written

specifically for the band.

"Writing for X number of pieces is really a trip because you can envision that there'll be a sax break here and something else there. You write for the specific people and their capabilities."

As a writer, Sobieski likes Johnson's ability to play a number of instruments well.

"There's a freedom there because I can have him start on guitar and switch to saxophone or clarinet."

Johnson plays an alto clarinet and its reedy-bass sound creates a distinctive mood. He's into jazz — he played reeds with a local jazz group — and says music with room is the type to play.

"The moments the band lives for are those improvising, on-the-spot moments."

But right now, Slow Buck is primarily a dance band.

"The band tries to fit the situation," says Johnson. "If there's room for spacing-out, it'll happen. If there's not, it won't."

The music is easy to dance to — Dewey Dubreuk keeps the rhythm steady without driving it — but it's also nice to listen to. Dubreuk's drumming has more finesse than power, and the vocals of bassist Lee Jones are mellow but interesting. Like Bob Weir of the Dead, Jones can scream when it's called for, but his voice is surprisingly melodic for the local scene.

"Singing is my favorite thing; I like to vary it as much as I can. All five of us sing lead, putting a lot of different voices in there."

The different voices are a plus for the band, but Jones predicts the group will sound much better in six months.

"You can be tight without a sense of subtleties. That's kind of where we're at. I think it'll improve as we get used to each other's styles."

Sobieski agrees the band will get better with time.

"We've been learning tunes pretty quick; not spending much time on them. As our repertoire grows we'll be able to spend the time necessary on a tune and get a good selection of material together."

This Saturday, Slow Buck will headline a dance in the King Cole Room at the Eugene Hotel. The Whiskey Creek String Band will open and the cover is \$2.50. The bar will be open, so only those 21 or older can get in.



Photos by Glen Ozonewood

Bass player Lee Jones (below) and guitarist Rick Johnson work out their own rhythms during a concert given by Slow Buck at the Olde Dexter Theatre. Honesty, Jones says, is the band's best policy.



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