

Celts Big Country invade U2 territory with 'The Crossing'

By Cort Fernald
Of the Emerald

"The Crossing"
Big Country
Mercury

Heed the advice on the first track of Big Country's debut album: "come up screaming" and play this album loud. It's better that way.

Big Country is something of an anachronism — they sound as if they are Led Zeppelin clones straight out of the early '70s. Rock critics in Britain are already hailing Big Country as the new U2. If there is any correlation between the two, it's that Steve Lillywhite produced "The Crossing" and U2's albums.

What's remarkable about Big Country is that in the face of a multitude of synth-pop duos and groups, they've adhered to rock'n'roll's traditional two guitars, bass and drums. It stirs the stagnant blood to hear the deep thump of a genuine bass drum and the snap of a snare drum. The synth-pop drums-by-computer are all right, but at times they sound like a wind-up monkey tapping coconut shells.

Big Country uses the double lead guitars of Bruce Watson and

Stuart Adamson. And both guitarists get a dirty sound that's refreshing in the light of the synth-popsters cleanliness. More than a dirty sound, Adamson manages a sound that seems uncannily like bag pipes.

The strongest tracks on "The Crossing" are those Big Country have previously released as singles in Britain: "In a Big Country," "Fields of Fire" and "Harvest Home."

"In a Big Country" starts with a drum intro that rocks. Mark Brzezicki's drum work on this track and others is surehanded and powerful. His stickwork is a definite strength of Big Country.

"I've never seen you look like this

Without a reason

Another promise fallen through
Another season passes by you."

Lyricaly, Big Country isn't anything to quote in letters home about. Big Country have forsaken the urban smarminess for a more, umm, earthy lyricism. They hail from the north and are part of the Celtic rock revival, if that explains anything. Their lyrics achieve an ambiguity that sounds as if they were written by a rock'n'roll Thomas Hardy. A sampling from "Fields of Fire" leaves a listener scratching their head wondering

what these fellows in sleeveless flannel shirts (collars, of course, turned up) and baggy trousers are singing about.

"The shining eye will never cry
The beating heart will never die
The house on fire holds no shame

I will be coming home again
400 miles without a word until you smile
400 miles on fields of fire."

"The Crossing" is a solid debut album, if not for the lyrics than for the integrity of Big Country's dedication to guitars and drums. Big Country does a lot with very little musically. Loudness adds weight to most of the track on the album.

Big Country may not be the new U2, that's assuming U2 isn't ready to be replaced. Yet, success for Big Country is as sure as a batch of brownies at a fat farm. Though, unless they mature musically and lyrically, their longevity may be just as brief as those brownies.

Noted yodeler-songwriter to W.O.W. them in Eugene

Bill Staines, singer-songwriter, champion yodeler and left-handed guitarist extraordinaire will make his first Eugene appearance next Tuesday night, Oct. 4, at the W.O.W. Hall, 8th Avenue and Lincoln Street.

Staines is the most requested guest performer on the weekly national public radio show *A Prairie Home Companion*, according to Garrison Keillor, the host of that broadcast. In addition to his radio appearances, Keillor reports that "Bill Staines plays to sellout crowds and standing-room-only extra shows here in St. Paul (Minnesota, where APHC originates)."

The same is true wherever Staines has appeared before; by word of mouth, the message is spread that this is a very special performer.

Based in New Hampshire, Staines, 36, spends close to 300 days a year on the road. And the road and its world are where many of his songs originate from — he sings of rodeos and cowboys, of rivers and highways, of travel and home, and of loves lost and found.

Staines has six albums to his credit, and unlike many other performers who have "made it," he still plays the small towns and byways hidden in the nooks and crannies of America.

His song titles reflect his eclectic search for inspiration, from towns like Sitka, Alaska and Piney River, Virginia — and when he sings "The Rivers of Texas," you believe that he has seen all 14 of them.

He is better known in New England, however, and a *Boston Globe* readers' poll recently ranked him among the top four folk performers.

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