

## THE BILLS

### Foot-Stompin' Hand-Clappin' Start to KCCA Season

Fresh from winning the Western Canadian Music Association's Entertainer-of-the-Year award, The Bills, folk ensemble extraordinaire, conquered Kelowna Wednesday at the Community Theatre. It was the Kelowna Community Concert Association's season opener.

Let me admit right off that roots music is not a passion of mine. And my wife probably finds the country-western ilk even more annoying than I do. But, confronted by five such versatile virtuosi, it was just not possible for us to avoid being swept along with their joyful sounds.

The Bills are an ensemble based in Victoria. Since 2002 they have been making a name for themselves not only for their exuberant interpretations and musicianship but also for their original songs and arrangements of traditional fare.

Besides singing, each of the Bills demonstrated a consummate mastery of his instrument or instruments: Glen Manders made his double bass emulate a coloratura cello, a contra bassoon, and even a side drum. Richard Moody's fiddle took off and almost went into orbit with sizzling variations on a Ukrainian kolomeika. One would be hard put to say which of Adrian Dolan's instruments--accordion, violin, or piano--was the most impressive. Showing extreme facility on the lead guitar as well as the mandolin was Marc Atkinson, whom I would guess to be the group's leader.

The least impressive instrumentally was Chris Frye, who just strummed along on his rhythm guitar. As the group's lyricist and lead singer, however, Frye proved himself as multifaceted as the others and arguably even more valuable.

Take any five musicians of comparable ability and you might expect an enjoyable concert. But add to that the Bills' energy and enthusiasm, and you have a memorable evening.

The group, formerly known as the Bill Hilly Band, can indeed sound like a bunch of backwater yokels. But when they play Hoagy Carmichael's Stardust or their "Shostakoverture," (based on a concerto by Dmitri Shostakovich) one begins to realize the extent of their acquaintance with different genres and to appreciate their sophistication.

Pacing of the concert was tight, and the Bills are to be commended for the ever-changing variety of the presentation: solos, duos, trios, quartets as well as the full ensemble. A couple of the Bills' offerings were strictly instrumental, and one number, Bamfield's John Vanden, was just sung--unaccompanied.

The full house was treated to an encore--The Moonshiner--after which the audience adjourned to the upper foyer to mingle with the performers over refreshments and to purchase CDs.