



'Sing us a song tonight'

Review by Casey McCabe
Entertainment Writer

A large and enthusiastic crowd was treated to an intimate evening with the Piano Man himself, as Billy Joel took the stage at Omaha's Music Hall Tuesday night.

The audience soon was to become enthralled with Joel's introspective style of music, and he received several standing ovations during the show, capped by three encores from the crowd who seemingly would not let him leave the stage.

Billy Joel started in music with 12 years of classical piano training. Developing out of this he has become one of the top keyboards artists in the country, and audiences are quickly captivated by the amazing lightning quick accuracy with which he races over the keys of his grand piano.

His first album, *Cold Spring Harbor* was released to excellent reviews, but did not move well, much of which Joel thought was because of poor producing. His fear of the studio ended two years later with the recording of *Piano Man*, a gold album which gave him his first hit single with the title track.

He soon developed a following, and has in no way disappointed his fans with the succeeding albums, *Streetlife Serenade*, *Tumstiles* and his latest effort *The Stranger*.

In Joel's Omaha performance, he played a great deal out of his large repertoire and seemed to focus more on the four-year-old *Piano Man* L.P. than his current album. Like much of his work, *Piano Man* was highly autobiographical. Joel spent part of his career as the piano player in a bar called "The Executive Room" in downtown Los Angeles.

Two real crowd pleasers off the album were "Captain Jack" and "The Ballad of Billy the Kid." He also shined in the sensitive "Southern Highland Falls" and in the old time piano boogie of "Root Beer Rag."

Donning sunglasses, a cigarette, and the piano bar mood, Joel went into "New York State of Mind," before a backdrop of the famous skyline of his home town. Along with "Say Goodbye to Hollywood," one of his encores, the two songs are indicative of his recent move from California back to New York.

He appeared fairly loose at the show, and entertained the audience with his off-the-cuff humor and an amusing parody of the typical rock star. Another unexpected pleasure was the performance of band member Richie Cannata, who accented and underscored Joel well with his sax, organ and clarinet work. The friendly crowd did not let his work go unnoticed as he received his share of ovations too.

Though Joel's show seems to focus on his piano, he also is an expert song stylist. His lyrics, though maybe too often cynical, are thought provoking and have the rare ability to capture a crowd. Also working to his advantage is the chance to headline in smaller auditoriums, which produces a much more positive situation than trying for the big time, which does not lend itself to his style. Some may remember his Lincoln appearance a few years back to a sparse crowd at Pershing Municipal Auditorium.

All in all it was a pleasant evening with a top notch performer. Maybe Billy Joel has given up on the big time, but he's found that even a frustrated kid from Long Island can find happiness with a piano and a satisfied crowd.

Photographs by Bob Pearson



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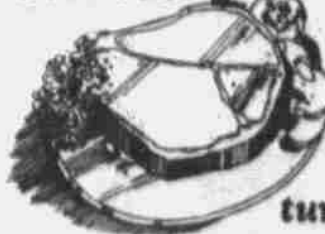
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