

arts/entertainment

Bluegrass band 'down-to-earth'

By Deb Emery

Like a blast of fresh air sweeping in from the windy city, the Special Consensus Bluegrass Band blew into town, leaving audiences demanding more.

In its first Lincoln appearance, the band swept in from that world-renowned capital of bluegrass, Chicago, to play at The Zoo.

The band includes Mark Weiss, mandolin; Marc Edelsten, bass; Greg Cahill, banjo; and Ed Walsh, guitar.

Chicago-based bluegrass comes as a surprise to most bluegrass fans, Cahill said. But, he said, bluegrass is very big in Chicago and six other full-time bluegrass bands originate from the city.

Cahill said he thinks that bluegrass's popularity is only natural in a city known for its black, blues jazz musicians because bluegrass is the "whiteman's blues."

Down-to-earth

"Bluegrass is alive music, down-to-earth, and not electric, with much improvisation," he said.

Bluegrass music seems to appeal to mostly college-age adults, he said, because it is a "rowdier, good time crowd thing."

A mostly college-age crowd turned out to hear the band Wednesday evening.

They opened with a fast-paced number called "The Glenville Train" and then contrasted it with a slow-moving piece entitled "The Tennessee Blues."

The band avoided the fault common to many other bluegrass bands with songs that start and end sounding the same by throwing in slow, blues-like numbers among the faster tempoed pieces.

Though a fiddle player could have enhanced the band, the musicians did a sufficient job on their instruments to make up for a fiddle part.

Rousing instrumentals

Cahill and Edelsten supplied strong vocals that satisfied the versatility needed to sing songs ranging from upbeat hoedown tunes to sad, lost-my-love strains.

Weiss and Walsh carried the band with rowing instrumentals.

Many of the band's songs were bluegrass standards like "Rocky Top" and "The Wabash Cannonball" but, the band did play a few original pieces.

First album

One of the pieces, "The Black Mountain Rag," appears on a recently produced 45 and will also appear on the group's first album, "Long Winter," to be released in two months, Cahill said.

The band has played together for four years and was interviewed for an article in this month's issue of *Bluegrass Unlimited*.

The group is currently on a Midwest tour and its next stop is Springfield, Ill.

However, the band members said they hope to return to Nebraska soon because of the warm reception they receive wherever they play.

"Nebraskans appreciate bluegrass music, and we look forward to returning soon," Cahill said.

Considering the band's reception, a strong easterly wind from Chicago could spell bluegrass good news for Nebraskans to warm the spirit, if not the snow.



Photo by Mark Billingsley

The Special Consensus Bluegrass Band picks away for a crowd at The Zoo bar.

Sontag compiles novel arrangement

By Bill Regier

Susan Sontag's *I, etcetera* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux) is a collection of short fiction that bypasses usual narrative formats for dialogues, diaries, a sci-fi fable and an anthology of quotations. It is like a display where lapis lazuli rests beside moon rocks and malachite beside fool's gold. Its attraction is in its arrangement, not in a uniform property.

book review

For starters she offers a timely "Project for a Trip to China." "Words that are pictures. Shadow Theater. Storm over Asia." Each paragraph gives an image of China; some recall its repression by the West in the current century. Sontag quotes a Missouri senator saying, "With God's help, we shall raise Shanghai up and up and up until it reaches the level of Kansas City."

The story overtly practices the Chinese art of quotation. Sontag adopts Walter Benjamin, Mao, Hegel, Foucault, *La Condition Humaine*, Althusser, Robbe-Grillet, Victor Hugo and *The Great Gatsby* for her re-examination of the idea of the "individual." Her reading list, like the reading of her stories, is neither easy nor narrow.

Iconoclastic *campeadora*, she rattles many popular prohibitions. She knows how to turn off the censorious early. "American Spirits" depicts Miss Flatface, a stifled woman who dedicates herself to venerary. She is abducted from Dear Jim and the children by Mr. Obscenity, who lives up to his name.

She soon tires of his excesses and runs away to a tattooed sailor, falling in love for the very first time. Her torrid life ends with ptomaine from a taco. "American Spirits" is Sontag's contribution to American bawdy.

"Old Complaints Revisited" is present-tense Orwell, an abstract of an international organization. It could be a corporation, a political movement, or a religious order. We are not told.

We are told that its members think there is too much talking, too little action; that its members are well-educated, and liable to persecution. We are told that the narrator wants out.

Doubt confession

The story is a confession of doubt written "a few inches off the ground." The narrator's problems are carefully generalized to express problems with virtually any organizations.

"Merit through suffering" is one of the organization's slogans. Another is "Deeper and deeper into the books." One such book is *What Must Be Done*, which echoes Lenin; equally venerated by the organization is the four volume *Commentaries*, which echoes the Vedas, the New Testament, or Code Napoleon.

Taking no chances that bias will obscure the problem of the organization, the narrator refuses to name its sex. "If I'm a man, the problem stands but I become a type. I'm too representative, almost an allegorical figure. If I'm a woman, I survive as a singular individual but my dilemma shrinks: it reflects the insecurities of the second sex. If I tell you I'm a woman, you'll write off my problem still the same problem! as merely 'feminine'."

Parents' contradictions

Problems of a different sort appear in "Baby." The parental half of a dialogue with a psychiatrist is given, seemingly a couple having difficulty with their child prodigy. Soon images of the child are shredded by the parents' contradictions.

He is poor at sports, but good at basketball and volleyball. He wets his bed, tries to poison his folks with his chemistry set, has an eight-year-old baby sitter, edits the high school paper, is married, is planning to marry, goes to a good school, goes to a bad school, is dead, alive, and likes rubber ducks. With a child like this, the parents are seen to be the ones needing therapy.

"Doctor Jeckyll's title hero is a surgeon who envies Eddy Hyde, a petty crook. Jeckyll thinks Eddy is more free. Jeckyll feels oppressed by his burly guru, Urterson, a clarty and bully who preaches "the proper uses of selfishness." Jeckyll, "alone in a world of monsters," finds Urterson maddening. His struggle to find "freedom" takes him far from Urterson's taddyish definitions.

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Jazz orchestra in financial straits

The Neoclassic Jazz Orchestra may leave Lincoln next year if attendance does not improve, according to the president of the orchestra.

John Tavlin said the band has lost \$1,700 in the first two concerts this year. The total cost for the two concerts was \$4,700, with the Nebraska Arts Council paying \$3,000 or the total cost, he said.

For the band to break even, Tavlin said, attendance has to reach 250. In the band's first concert of the year attendance was only 150.

Smaller communities such as Ogallala, Ord and Seward are more interested in the band than is the Lincoln area.

"People in Lincoln and Omaha take cultural events for granted," Tavlin said. "Almost 90 percent of the cultural events in Omaha and Lincoln are supported by one percent of the population."

The Neoclassic Jazz Orchestra is a non-profit organization supported partly through grants from the Nebraska Arts Council. Tavlin said people do not realize that "any non-profit organization trends on thin ice every year."

Financial problems

Other reasons for the orchestra's financial problems are the costs involved in renting a place to play and in advertising, Tavlin said.

"Our funds are so limited that it's hard to advertise extensively."

Because the band is a non-profit organization, it receives publicity through public service announcements on the radio, he said. He also said the band advertises in the *Omaha World Herald* and Lincoln papers.

The cost for rental of a hall and advertising is \$900 per

concert, Tavlin said. He said this cost does not include the salaries of band members and guest performers.

Another reason for the poor response to the orchestra, he said, is that a community will support outside groups but not their own local bands.

"People think that if it's local it's no good."

Biggest draw

The Neoclassic Jazz Orchestra will perform this April with Clark Terry, a jazz trumpet and flugelhorn player. Tavlin said Terry is the "biggest jazz draw in the Lincoln area."

"Clark Terry is a great jazz musician. He's as popular as Maynard Ferguson," Tavlin said. "That concert should draw a large crowd."

Rex Cadwallader, director of the Neoclassic Orchestra, said the attendance problem stems from a form of prejudice against jazz.

"We're not dealing with as big a segment of the society because people think jazz is an intellectual form of music," Cadwallader said. "I think that kind of attitude came from the 60s."

Poor attendance jeopardizes future concerts in Lincoln, Cadwallader said.

"We found this year that the concert series had poor participation," Cadwallader said. "Whatever playing we do in Lincoln next year, it won't be a series, it will be on a single concert basis without guest artists."

Guest artists, Cadwallader said, aren't really necessary to the success of the band. He said the band can stand on its own.

Cadwallader said he's optimistic about the future of the Neoclassic Jazz Orchestra.