

arts/entertainment

Russell-Revival act displays amazing versatility

By Bill Graf

Ever wondered what happened to Leon Russell? Leon is alive and well and on the road again. But unlike road shows of the past, where he'd pack a local auditorium with excitable teenagers, Leon has teamed up with a bluegrass band and is playing funky beer halls and road houses.

Wednesday night at the Lawrence, Kan., Opera House, the act was tight, the crowd was tighter, and Leon and the back-up band, The New Grass Revival, played tunes they wanted. Most of the tunes have never sold records, but the reason why isn't completely clear.



Although the show had an overall country flavor, both Leon and the Revival displayed amazing versatility. At one point they did Paul McCartney's "Yesterday," and a moment later it was Bill Monroe's song about his fiddle-playing uncle called "Uncle Pen."

A moment after that, Leon was center stage wielding a sunburst Les Paul Guitar and doing "Tight Wire" off of *Carney*, one of his best-selling albums on the Shelter label.

Although Leon's long grey hair and beard give the impression that the road has had its effect, his voice still is as powerful and smooth as ever. His guitar and especially

his piano work, for which he's best known, have not been tarnished with age.

Leon may be 40-years old and look like he's going on 60, but his musical talents still are growing and we'll be hearing from him for several years to come.

Any review of Wednesday's show can't go too far without commenting on The New Grass Revival. The stand-outs are Sam Bush on mandolin, fiddle and vocals, and John Cowan on bass and vocals. Courtney Johnson on banjo and Curtis Burch on guitar and dobro are nothing short of musicians' musicians. The Cowan-Bush vocals fit as one. And the bluegrass world hasn't seen a tenor as powerful and controlled as Cowan since John Duffy and the old Ralph Stanley band. Bush's mandolin and fiddle work is hot, fast and clean—a skill that puts him in high demand as a studio musician.

As a whole, the band is the most progressive country band around. They've taken what looks like a traditional bluegrass band, added amplifiers, which makes the sound sharp and driving and spiced in electronic gadgetry that would make the most devoted new waver stop and take notice.

The lyrics of their original music fit the folk genre of earlier bluegrass, but reflect modern ideas and morality.

The Revival has four albums on the Flying Fish label, which have supplied Lincoln bluegrass bands with a good share of their material, but are only available through special order. Go to the trouble, it's worth it. Or better yet, catch the Russell-Revival act. You may be surprised to find that you can also be a bluegrass fan when you thought such things were impossible.



Daily Nebraskan Photo

Leon Russell and his New Grass Revival Band performed Wednesday at the Lawrence (Kansas) Opera House.

Glass Onion now 'more than just a restaurant'

By Sioux Braun

It was "inspired insanity" that urged owner Mark Vasino to close the doors of the Glass Onion, strip its insides, and dress the place all over again.

When the change is finished, the restaurant will be suited for theater goers as well as the vegetarian, the artist and wine connoisseurs.

According to Vasino, the chairman of the university theater department, Rex McGraw, is largely responsible for the addition of the new theater space at the Glass Onion.

After the success of a few university repertoire theater events at the Onion this summer, Vasino says he started seriously thinking about adding a theater.

"Rex put a bug in my ear. He was very helpful and real supportive."

Noting his trial and error attempt at sharing his space with the Lincoln Jazz Society, Vasino admits he simply likes to use his space for more than just a restaurant.

The new theater is called the Glass Onion Cooperative Theater incorporated by Mark Vasino, Sharon Grady and Dave Landis.

Although the university will sponsor some of the productions at the theater, Vasino says he hopes to supply dramatic presentations that will "fit a different niche than the university theater and the Lincoln Community Playhouse."

The university teaches the craft of theater and the playhouse concentrates on entertaining, says Vasino.

"We want to explore the dramatic ground between those two."

Sharon Grady, artistic director for the co-op, says she wants to have a good relationship with the other groups around town, "but I want it to be understood that we are something different."

The theater will be a sponsoring as well as a producing organization. Grady says they will produce their own shows once a month but will continue to sponsor poets, musicians and other artists from the region.

For example, in April the Magic Theater of Omaha will present "Objective Love," by Megan Terry. The production will be supported by a grant from the Nebraska Committee for the Humanities. A few humanists along with the playwright and members of the cast will talk with the audience after the show.

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Stars turn to gelatin at sight of 'coveted' awards

The past week marked the opening of the official award grabbing season for the entertainment industry. The American Music Awards and the Golden Globe Awards were both doled out last week amid much to-do and glitter and froth. As usual, I don't remember who won what, and I'm not all that sure that I care.

Ultimately, it doesn't matter anyway because there are enough awards to go around now that everybody in Hollywood can waltz home with something.

Background Artwork on a Documentary can be just as full of articular anguish as the Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actress, Best Actor crowd.

This can create a problem for the people in the major categories because the award shows are geared such that the major categories appear at the end. So the big winners have to make real grandstand plays to top all who have gone before them; they have to cry more, or thank more people, or—dare I think it—rehearse.

(The scene: A studio somewhere in Hollywood. It is the final dress rehearsal before the Prestigious and Glorious Entertainment Awards for 1981, and all of the

big nominees are rehearsing their acceptance speeches.)

The director is addressing the stage. On stage is an actress who is up for the Best Actress Award.

"Okay, Babs," says the director, "Hal Holbrook tears open the envelope and says you are the winner. The music plays and you come racing to the stage amid thunderous applause. You take the award, hug Hal Holbrook, and with tears in your eyes you say..."

"I can't do this." The director waves his arms and grumbles, "No," too softly for her to hear.

"Babs," he says, then takes a breath to try and gain his composure, "you can't go out in front of a national television audience and say 'I can't do this.' America is going to be out there expecting you to turn into living tapioca."

"We will have to disappoint them, then."

"Babs, what are you saying! The viewing public will go out of its collective noodle if you just stand up there and freeze. Look, we'll compromise. You don't have to scream and cry, you can give a little heart-wrenching speech. How about, 'A year ago, a man named Herman Mogul came to me with an idea for a wonderful movie...'"

"No," said Babs firmly. "C'mon Babs, it's a tradition. Everybody that wins cries their face off."

"Then make sure I don't win." "Whattsa?" countered the director cleverly.

"Give the award to someone else. I don't care whether I win it or not, so you might as well give it to someone who wants it bad enough to go through with all of this schlock. It'll be easy. Tonight we sneak into the offices of the independent accounting firm of Price-Waterhouse, where they tabulate the ballots, and then we..."

"Your kind just can't be tolerated in Hollywood," said the director softly. "You'd ruin it for everybody." He signalled, and two guys in pinstriped suits step onto the stage. "Rocko, Knuckles, take this lady for a little drive in the country, if you know what I mean."

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But every year I watch the award shows. It is because of the acceptance speeches. Actually, "acceptance speech" might be a misnomer, because it implies a degree of organization and planning that these ramblings lack. The lack of organization is why I watch and enjoy them.

There is something refreshing about watching the biggest names in Hollywood (or New York or Nashville or anywhere) turn to gelatin at the sight of flashy hardware. The same people who can regale Johnny Carson with extemporaneous tales of life in the leisure class suddenly find themselves unable to put together three consecutive words of English. Take away the uptown clothing and the big winners on the award shows would be indistinguishable from the big winners on "Let's Make a Deal." They act, in short, the same way we would act.

The prestige of the award doesn't matter at all. The people who win Oscars for Best Use of Orange and Green in the