

Arts & Entertainment

Alabama plays for itself and others

By Mike Frost

Modern country music has gone, thus far, through three distinct periods. Period No. 1 was dominated by stars like Ernest Tubb, Hank Snow, George Jones and Hank Williams. The goal was to release strong singles, to make it to the top five of the country charts and to be asked to play on the Grand Ole Opry.

The second era was dominated by Willie and Waylon and the boys. They rejected previous notions about country music; they didn't necessarily want to be in the top five, and they didn't want to be in the Country Hall of Fame. Rather, they devoted their careers to making the kind of music they believed in — which, often, was not the music of the Nashville powerbrokers.

Now, we are well into the third period. At the center of this epoch is Alabama, a lively quartet from Ft. Payne, Ala., who not only want to make music they love, but — and they admit this — want to be rich and famous country music superstars as well.

Alabama played an energetic concert to a near-capacity crowd in Lincoln's Bob Devaney Sports Center Friday night. The band is in the midst of a 120-city tour (they spent Thursday in Nashville, Friday in Lincoln, Saturday in Iowa City, etc.) promoting the release of their fifth RCA album, *Roll On*. Despite the rushed schedule, three of the members took time out to talk to the local press Friday afternoon in the Cornhusker Hotel.

Jeff Cook, Randy Owen and Teddy Gentry (a fourth member, drummer Mark Herndon, opted out of the conference) talked about what it was like to be a country music band in the 1980s.

"A hit song is a hit song," said Owen, the most prominent member. "(We) don't do a song and say, OK, this song is for all kids, and this is for all the older people. We do it because it's a hit record.

"We try to do positive music. We try to do a positive show," he said.

Despite this preoccupation with recording a "hit," the band still maintains a certain integrity.

"Our music is simple, it's real down-to-earth. We try to be real progressive as far as stage shows,"



Dave Trouba/Daily Nebraskan

(From left) Jeff Cook, Teddy Gentry and Randy Owen at their Friday press conference in the Cornhusker Hotel.

Owen said.

The three started performing together in 1969 (Herndon later joined the three, who are cousins) under the name Young Country. The name eventually changed to Wild Country "because we weren't young anymore," guitarist Cook said.

Eventually they settled on Alabama.

"We wanted to change the name because there were several groups called Wild Country, and Avon had an aftershave called Wild Country," Gentry said.

The name can cause difficulties when they play in states not named Alabama. "The first time we played here, we played the fair. This guy came by and he said 'Boys, I love your music but I hate your football team,'" Owen said.

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Czech orchestra gives grand tour of Bohemia

The Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, which appeared Friday night in Lincoln's Kimball Recital Hall, provided a feast for both the eyes and ears.

The Philharmonic, which is currently traipsing around the country on an historical tour, was founded in 1896. It was originally conducted by Antonin Dvorak, whose work was represented in Friday's performance. Its full, precise style has long been a favorite of international audiences.

Review

Even if the relatively small Kimball stage seemed cluttered, the sound the Czech Philharmonic provided was far from that. The word "big" — or perhaps more suitably, "grandiose" — must be chosen as the operative adjective. The several dozen violins seemed to miraculously blend into one technically perfect instrument. Even the different families of instruments — the brass, the strings, the percussion, the woodwinds — seemed at points in Friday's presentation to be singing as one instrument.

The ensemble was under the skillful baton of Jiri Belohlavek. Although he is not as theatrical as some more prominent conductors, Belohlavek, who has been with the Czech Philharmonic since 1970, was clearly in control.

Belohlavek provided a brilliant program. All the pieces were by Czech composers. Therefore, not only was the evening one of exquisite music, it was also a chance to appreciate Czech culture.

The first piece *The Moldau* by Bedrich Smetana is part of a six-piece orchestral look at Bohemia. *The Moldau's* musical allusions to life along the Moldau River make it a capable representative of the six pieces.

Bhuslav Martinu's *Symphony No. 4* reflects among other influences, some the composer's fascination with jazz. Although there is no jazz riff per se, the call and response between the strings and woodwind instruments is reminiscent of the early jazz sound.

Former Czech Philharmonic conductor Antonin Dvorak's *Symphony No. 8 in G Major* was the evening's final piece, and in many ways, the highlight as well. Dvorak's skillful use of recurring musical themes helped distinguish the piece.

The cumulative effect of the three pieces brought the capacity crowd to its collective feet. The orchestra rewarded their thunderous ovation with a short, furious piece by Mozart. Unfortunately, conductor Belohlavek's accent garbled the title as he announced it. Audience members quizzed each other ("What did he say?") As the orchestra began, the audience hushed and sat enraptured, as they had all evening, to the moving sounds of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra.

The Stalker leaves writer wishing

By Eric Peterson

The Stalker, a 1980 film by Andrei Tarkovsky, extends over two hours and forty minutes; viewers who plunge easily into science fiction and value its symbols and metaphors for their own sake may enjoy it.

Film Review

I veered, after the first few minutes, between boredom and irritation. *The Stalker* shows tonight at 7 p.m. in the Sheldon Film Theater as part of the University Program Council's Foreign Film Series.

The beginning is promising — the filming is particularly interesting, in a monochromatic dark ivory tone. People and rooms look strange and fascinating in the flatness of the browns and dull whites. This brown world returns at the end, after a trip into a Zone which has no twilight but only an overcast and dark afternoon.

The brownness is that of a world whose hope, the Stalker finds out, has been lost. The few out-of-Zone scenes we see — the Stalker's home, a bar where he meets two men he is taking into the forbidden Zone, and a train and trainyard — point out a deadened planet, and ironically the only place that has color is the one where nobody lives.

The Zone was created when a meteor from outer space — perhaps a visitation of the gods, one speaker says — lands in the countryside, and people start disappearing soon after. The police cordon off the area and try to keep the curious out for their own safety, but rumors of a chamber in which any wish can be granted draw many seekers who never return; or rather, one seeker named Porcupine did return, became enormously rich, and died within a week by hanging himself. An army sent in by the (presumably) Russian generals also results in the death and disappearance of all the soldiers who penetrated the Zone.

The Stalker is a young man who considers the Zone his home and seems to understand it better than anyone else; he pays a writer and a physicist to accompany him into its depths, and their main function seems to be to walk in front of him to run the gauntlet of the Zone's hazards; the science fiction equivalent of land mines recurs as the film progresses.

Everyone has experienced books or films in which the main character, who is supposed to be sympathetic, does not appeal at all. The reader or viewer has to be careful at that point to discover whether the obnoxious character really is supposed to be sympathetic. Even though the Stalker's cheating and power manipulation are in part revealed near the end, his sure understanding of how obstacles in the Zone need to be negotiated indicates a certain supposed trustworthiness. Despite the Stalker's momentary falterings, he prevents his own and his companion's deaths numerous times.

However, his Zen-like philosophy seemed insufferable from the start. The Stalker speaks several times of the virtues of weakness and suppleness, hope and outward foolishness — but does not convince. That is the major problem in *The Stalker*: the distance between what the film seems to ask viewers to accept and what is in fact convincing or strongly expressed. The writer's big moment comes as he talks — in a big room full of little sand dunes — of the cross he bears — the critics, his family, his readers — nobody understands. What is clearly supposed to be an agonizing moment of self-searching only comes across as absurd self-pity. When the Stalker's wife says even a bitter happiness with him is better than a dull, gray life, I wanted to ask why this woman was kidding herself. Even on the simplest plot level, it's too easy that the searchers get into the Zone, in a dangerous way which is supposed to be suspenseful, and isn't. The principal metaphor of the film is the wish room, which turns out to be intolerable — no one would want their last wish or their real wish granted. Yawn. If this idea were more debatable, the film would be hard put to demonstrate it.