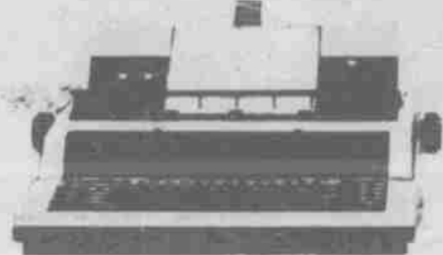


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Haggard's new farm group, music win audience approval

By Mike Grant
Staff Reporter

Will the real Orie Haggard please stand up?

I ask this because during his Nebraska State Fair performance at the Bob Devaney Sports Center Sunday night, Haggard treated the audience to two versions of himself.

At times, Haggard was a western-swing bandleader in the tradition of Bob Wells and his Texas Playboys. At other times, he was a redneck version of Woody Guthrie.

High." The latter two Haggard performed with opening singer Janie Fricke.

Haggard has a rich, sweet baritone voice with plenty of depth to reveal emotion. It's no accident that he uses the fiddle's rich tones to highlight his voice.

Haggard's back-up band, The Strangers, have overwhelming talent. It is a shame that group members aren't well known in their own right.

Not only was Belkin in top fiddling form, but Mark Reary on the piano gave some memorable jam sessions.

However, The Strangers' brass section was used too much. Horns don't work well in country music, and during the concert the two horn players sounded almost like a lame Dixieland band. Instead of enhancing the songs, they seemed like an intrusion into the music.

Clint Stroom is an excellent lead guitarist, but his nimble, almost jazzy sound got bothersome after a while. It eventually faded off into background music. It's pleasant and mellow, but nothing to write home about.

All in all, Haggard is a good bandleader. He just needs to keep the pace up and to integrate the sound of his sidemen.

Alternating with the crooning and western swing was Haggard's popular working-man mentality.

Before Haggard got on stage, a spo-

kesman explained Haggard's interest in the current farm crisis. Haggard, the spokesman said, was founding "U.S.A. for America," a group to help the beleaguered farm economy.

Along with aiding the destitute countries of the world, the United States also should concentrate on its current domestic problems, Haggard's spokesman said.

In this spirit, the spokesman said, the concert in Lincoln would be used for a live record called "Amber Waves of Grain — The American," which will be released soon after the Farm Aid concert in Champaign, Ill., next month.

Oh yes, Haggard did get to sing a little. Nobody does a better job singing about the depressions and dreams of the U.S. working class than Haggard. From his childhood poverty in Bakersfield, Calif., to the time he served in prison (he was pardoned by then-Gov. Ronald Reagan) Haggard has lived, well, a haggard life. And it all comes out in songs such as "Momma Tried," a tune about the son who went bad, and "Big City," a tune about escaping urban dreariness for the freedom of Montana.

The crowd saved its biggest reaction for Haggard's theme song, the ultimate redneck anthem, "Okie from Muskogee." Although deep down it's a silly, bullheaded song, Haggard plays it like the relic it is and without any apologies.

REVIEW CONCERT

Either way, Haggard was a big hit with the 7,000-member audience from the moment he stepped on stage wearing a blue Nebraska Future Farmers of America jacket and a white cowboy hat, until he closed the 90-minute concert with "Okie from Muskogee".

Opening with "The Orange Blossom Special," Haggard and fiddler Jimmy Belkin broke into a searing fiddle face off. Both emerged as winners.

The rest of the show was basically a review of Haggard's greatest hits, including "Pancho & Lefty," "Looking for a Place to Fall Apart" and "Natural

BR's country-pop-punk is 'happy'

BEAT from Page 12

This record isn't country enough to turn Farmer Brown's plow. It's an upbeat, uplifting collection of fun, danceable pop tunes with a veil of country-western style thrown over it. And it sounds better every time I listen to it.

In the tradition of country-western writers, band leader Steve Almass has written tunes that deal with breakups and lost loves. With song titles such as "Just Friends," "Without You," "Fal-

ling Out Of Love" and "Not the Girl Loves Me," I think you can get the picture.

Ironically, the songs come across as quite the opposite of their titles. The tunes actually are happy. The overall effect, is the perfect rock 'n' roll attitude of "who the hell cares, anyway?"

The album's best chance for radio airplay is the first cut, "Just Friends," a simple tune reminiscent of the Everly Brothers' catchy "Wake Up Little Suzie."

Other fine tunes include "Mimi," "Who's Gonna Be Around" and "Falling Out of Love."

"Staying Out Late" is I.R.S. Record's first country-pop-punk record, and the company is promoting it heavily. I.R.S. has succeeded in the past with such bands as The Police, The Go Go's, R.E.M. and the English Beat."

The album is recorded and produced very well. Instrumentation and vocals alike come off the vinyl with a clarity rarely found on a debut album. I'll give it a 3.2 on the G.P.A. scale.



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