

Hardwick Gazette, February 15, 2006

A Warm and Spontaneous Concert

REVIEW

By David K. Rodgers

CRAFTSBURY — Really good folk musicians connect personally with their audience not only through the beauty and meaning of their songs but through their banter between works. They explain the background to the music, what might have inspired the lyrics, as well as topical remarks on everything from the weather outside to national politics.

Richard Ruane, Beth Duquette and Mitch Barron demonstrated their sophistication as performers in all these ways Saturday at the Music Box. They shared a warm and spontaneous sense of humor that kept everyone entertained through their almost two dozen songs.

Ruane is a skillful player of guitar, banjo, mandolin and ukulele with a classic folk singers voice, and he composed most of the tunes. Duquette has a particularly lovely, pure voice with fine enunciation. Barron provides an excellent foundation rhythm on his electric bass guitar and upright double bass. Ruane and Duquette harmonize well vocally, that male/female contrast enriching the melodic lines.

Many of the songs had “love gone south” as their theme. “Don't You Trust Me” chronicles an escape from an obsessive love that was not mutual; “Bread and Bones” describes a man running away from a relationship but having no one to talk to. “If I Go” expresses the contradictory hesitancy of an impending breakup (“I don't know what I feel inside”), while “You Can't Find A Thing That Isn't There” is a warning not to “go looking for love from me.”

Other songs were based on particular events and people in Ruane's life. There is a ballad about an uncle who borrowed money from his father, disappeared and then finally telephoned to return it 20 years later. Another is taken from a real street character in Burlington, a panhandler who “loved his cheap wine but was ‘not a wise old man.’”

More whimsical works asked the question “Why do coyotes sound so blue?”, and about a stone castle floating in the air, whose owner is possessed by the fear of losing his possessions.

In a very different vein was “Lord Franklin.” This song is based on the historical disaster of the loss of an expedition trying to find the fabled Northwest Passage through the Arctic early in the 19th Century. Three traditional folk songs rounded out the interestingly varied repertoire of this group.

Ruane's original songs had excellent melodies, combining imaginative lyrics with well-crafted tunes, frequently having demanding instrumental work. He has been an active performer around the Burlington area for over 20 years and now runs the Ripton Coffeehouse, a popular venue for local folksingers. His current CD is entitled “Things That Strangers Say.”