Old, new Byrds play solid show

By Steve Grant

The Byrds took a big step Friday night towards dispelling their reputation as an awfully bland band. While their records still overachieve their performances in concert, their two sets at the Boston Tea Party were, for the most part, enjoyable, with plenty of excitement thrown in—commonly seldom found on their records.

The show wasn’t without faults, though. Roger (nee Glen) McGinn is too infatuated with his new-found C & W style to make oldies like “Mr. Tambourine Man” and “Turn! Turn! Turn!” desirable. The third song in the medley, “Eight Miles High,” was supplied by drummer Gary Parsons’ penchant for hooting around with the oldies, but managed to conjure up some excitement anyway. There were others—the Byrds’ Greatest Hits as played by Beck Owens—country hits in “Goink Back,” “Chains of Freedom,” “Bell’s of Alabama,” “My Back Pages,” and the two shows-mentioned hatchet jobs that just don’t make it.

But when the Byrds jump headlong into their country material, watch out. They’ve taken material from their two latest albums Sweetheart of the Rodeo and Dr. Byrds and Mr. Hyde and, for the most part, it was meant stuff. McGinn went through a second childhood, with sun-baked hillbilly and graceful twang style, proving once again that no band can create audience level of rapport better than their own concerns for the material. McGinn and his group were interested, and so was the audience.

The opening ‘You Ain’t Goin’ Nowhere’ was a good precursor for much of the evening—the easy rolling carried through girl’s try to forget the oldest most of the evening. They even did “Red Hot Beethoven” — well, why not? But we couldn’t have been more at home with “Mr. Spaceman,” “The Children’s Hour,” “Lately,” “Revolution,” “Downtown,” and, of course, “Turn! Turn! Turn!”

They weren’t boring, either. During “Wholes on Fire”—this whole wheel was exploitable, it almost did happen, right there in the ballroom. “Baby, What You Want Me to Do,” “Wheels on Fire,” “He Was A Friend of Mine,” the closing “Bad Night at the Whiskey,” and the evening’s top number, “Hickory Wind.”

Each minute you spend in indecision is a minute wasted... a minute that adds up to an hour or a day that has vanished forever.

That minute may have been a minute wasted... a minute that adds up to an hour or a day that has vanished forever. One of the few songs that really grabbed the audience was “You Ain’t Goin’ Nowhere”... a song that could have made the Byrds the biggest group in the country another big push with the very down-home records they’ve done lately. You can watch the Beatles on TV and wonder what will happen next, but the Byrds are at last as much on top of the situation.

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