

Folk Music Returns to Roots, But Some Try to Keep Them Buried

by Con Chapman

ACTON, Mass. It's Folk Music Night at The Den of Iniquity, a coffeehouse in the basement of an Episcopal Church here that serves as a meeting place for those whose tastes are offended by the thumping bass beats and loudspeakers to be found in local bars. "Folk music *aficionados* are more genuine than lounge lizards," says Rev. Norbert Stowe, who is manager of the club by virtue of his status as pastor. "Instead of a meatmarket atmosphere, we promise a more tofu-like experience."

" . . . and Jim is sleeping with Jerry's wife."

Part of the passion for sincerity that is embedded in the club's mission statement is a commitment to original music that faithfully depicts the lives of everyday people in the area. "I think we'd be doing our patrons a disservice if all they heard when they came here was 'Greensleeves' and 'The Whistling Gypsy Rover,'" Stowe says. "We carefully vet our acts to make sure the mirror they hold up to life doesn't present a mere reflection of the past."

" . . . and so vote NO on Proposition 2-0!"

As a result, featured acts take a page from the happenings around them in the area, much as the wandering minstrels of days gone by would work true stories of love affairs and killings into their lays. "People have forgotten that folk music comes from real folk," says Ted Dwynar, tonight's opening act, as he tunes his guitar. "You've got to use the material of your own life if you want to keep it fresh."



"That lousy bitch was such a phony that I stopped paying alimony."

Dwynar's opening number is a rousing anthem on a political issue that has no reverberations beyond the town's borders, an upcoming vote on a bond issue that would finally, after 300 years of doing without, finance a sewer system for residents who currently rely on septic tanks or cesspools. *"It's gonna raise our taxes quite a bit, and*

only for to haul away our . . . crap,” he says with a smile in a nod to the church's no-profanity policy. The audience is evenly divided between those in favor and those opposed to the measure, but they put aside their differences with a bi-partisan round of applause when the song comes to an end.

“Well my old man is such a total jerk—cut off my allowance and told me to go to work.”

Next Dwyndar turns to a song of a love gone wrong, specifically, his first marriage. *“Violet was into shells and sea anemones, now I deal with her lawyer 'cause she's the enemy,”* he sings, and a few grey-haired widows in the crowd try to catch his eye to signal their availability.

Next up is Basil Sheed, a banjo-picker with a self-produced EP to his credit, who is known for his detailed slice-of-life songs that, in

his words, "peel back the shrink wrap from the little hermetically-sealed packages our daily lives have become." *"O, the Daisy Chain goes round and round, sparking gossip round the town,"* he begins, then settles in for a series of verses that detail the various infidelities he's aware of. *"Jim is sleeping with Jerry's wife, keeps her moanin' through the night,"* he sings. *"Sandy likes the way Bob spansks, when he's done she gives him thanks."*



"Good song. I didn't realize you were boinking my wife until the last verse."

Stowe grows concerned that Sheed is coming dangerously close to a violation of the group's policy of not giving needless offense to any living animal, vegetable or mineral, and rises from his spot at the card table near the entrance in order to act swiftly if he goes over the line.

"When a preacher comes to visit your spouse, you better make sure you're in the house," he sings, but before he can get the next line out of his mouth Stowe cuts him off with a curt *"Thank you very much Basil,"* and grabs the microphone. *"There's congo bars and mulled cider over in the Snack Shack."*

