

Cuz's Corner

By Dennis Frost

By the time you get this month's newsletter, we'll be well into the 2009 holiday season and looking at yet another year. It's no doubt been another great year for music with probably more roots music shows in the area than I can ever recall. With the exception of a few poorly attended shows, attendance has been surprisingly good considering the 12% unemployment rate in the Charlotte area. I guess this just proves that folks need the healing power of music even more in stressful times like these!

Over the last decade or so I've become spoiled by our many intimate area venues and house concerts. There is something to be said for the experience of feeling the energy of a performer and absorbing one's self in near perfect sound, so consequently it's been a long, long time since I have set foot in an arena to hear music. Well, folks, having heard that this might be the last major tour for **Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band**, I figured back in early November that this was the time. Believe me, from the moment we stepped into the Time-Warner Arena I felt like Jimmy Stewart in **Mr. Smith Goes to Washington**. I was a bit disappointed when I realized that our first-row balcony seats were on row I – sure looked like a one to me! When we walked up to our seats, the two things that were immediately obvious were the fact that we were a city block from the stage and, even worse, we were behind the big black curtain that stretched from the back of the stage to about the ten-yard line. I surely had that “here we go again” look on my face as we waited in line for replacement tickets, which wound up being two city blocks from the

stage. You know Charlotte is in hard economic times when the Boss doesn't sell out even the seats behind the stage! After stewing for a few minutes, the ole Cuz decided to take control of the situation and find some unoccupied seats downstairs. Having successfully penetrated the lower arena, we immediately saw the smiling faces of our across-the-street neighbors who invited us to join them on a small veranda in front of one those private boxes. (Who needs a seat at a Springsteen show, anyway?) About the time I was feeling good about life, a big, burly security officer came and cleared the area. The four of us found seats right below the railing, fairly close to the stage and life was good again until the owners came to claim their expensive seats right at show-time. Over the years, I've adopted a no retreat policy when it come to hearing music, so down, down we went until a couple of seats magically appeared a few rows up from the floor (thirty-yard line) and, praise the Man Upstairs, there we stayed for the nearly three-hour show. The seats were never used but for one song, but the space was truly appreciated and we truly thank the folks that decided to be elsewhere. If you have never seen the Boss, the experience is much like a big old sweaty tent revival on a Mississippi August afternoon. From the onset, when Bruce told the audience that “we're going to build a

town tonight,” and asked for some noise, the roof was blown off and remained so for the whole show. There are very few performers that can turn a huge, daunting space into a warm, cozy one like Springsteen can – he loves his fans and shows it by putting 150% into every performance. I have no idea how he does it at age 60. Twenty-six songs were performed, including six encores and the entire **Born to Run** album. There was even a segment during the middle part of the show where songs requested on cardboard signs were collected by the Boss and performed. A



“Cuz” and Little Bit

couple of these were covers, and I especially enjoyed the raucous version of **I Shot the Law!** I left the arena with both my ears and my heart buzzing – **Cuz Goes to the Coliseum** had the same “feel good” ending as that famous Jimmy Stewart movie of days gone by! I feel it's an almost religious experience on the

rare occasion one experiences this kind of energy at a concert and **Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band** get both gig of the month (November) and of the year!

Well, it's that time of the year, so let's talk Christmas music. Although this one came out late last year, my pick for this holiday season is hands down **Little Windows' Snowman's Waltz**. If you know the music of Julee Glaub and Mark Weems, I don't need to tell you that the arrangements are sparse but lush and the vocal harmonies are second to none. They cover tunes here that have an old world, traditional feel and I truly think it should be a part of your

music library. (www.littlewindows.net) Speaking of which, I bet I know where one might just get a copy. Mark and Julee will be performing at our annual Christmas potluck on December 12th, so don't miss it! (See front page article.)

I'll have to give another listen to the next pick before I wholeheartedly recommend it, but it surely is quirky enough to give it a try. Believe it or not, **Bob Dylan** has a new CD of Christmas tunes, **Christmas in the Heart**. His voice isn't quite as endearing as Mark and Julee's, but I do love the retro 1950s sound on classics such as **Winter Wonderland** and **Here Comes Santa Claus**. All the royalties will go to **Feeding America**, so that's a cool thing! (www.bobdylan.com) Hey, could a Tom Waits Christmas disc be right around the corner?

John Cowan has a new seasonal disc entitled **Comfort and Joy** that I'm sure you will enjoy. As you probably know, I've been a fan of John's all the way back to the ground-breaking days of the **New Grass Revival**. If you combine John Cowan's silky vocals with a bluegrass take on the old classics, I feel this is a very satisfying effort. My, my, the boy can sing! (www.johncowan.com)

Although not a seasonal album, I would wholeheartedly recommend **Things About Comin' My Way**, which is a tribute to the music of the **Mississippi Sheiks**. Between 1930 and 1935, guitarist/singer **Walter Vinson** and fiddler **Lonnie Chatmon** were members of the popular string band, the **Mississippi Sheiks**, and were responsible for songs such as **Too Long**, **Please Baby**, and **Sitting on Top of the World** (covered by the **Carolina Chocolate Drops**). In addition to the **Drops**, artists here include **John Hammond**, **Bruce Cockburn**, **Bill**

Frisell, **Kelly Joe Phelps**, **Del Rey**, and many others. This disc would be a great way to discover a relatively obscure band covered by the likes of Bill Monroe, Ray Charles, Doc Watson, Van Morrison, Bob Dylan, and more. I guess you could say the **Sheiks** were musicians' musicians and this one gets a gold star!

Cuz's gig of the month (December) is the **Redbird Round** house concert at the home of Mark and Bethli Clemens on December 11th. Redbird Round combines the talents of **Laurelyn Dossett (Polecat Creek)**, **Diana Jones**, and **Alice Gerrard**, all contemporary performers that write and perform songs that feel as if they have been a part of American culture for centuries. This is a "no miss" in a house concert setting. Recently, Laurelyn has been covered by the great **Levon Helm** and Diana by **Joan Baez** – need I say more? This one is this year's gift idea from yours truly, so treat a friend or two! Have a great holiday season and we'll see you next year!

Cuz

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