

Doc Watson's show full of warmth and humor

By JIM CLARDY

The finals of the First Oxbow Music Flatpicking and Fiddling contest were held Friday night at Chapel Hill High School, before an audience of 300.

Doc Watson, with son Merle, then took the stage before an enthusiastic audience, accompanied by Michael Coleman on bass, who has performed with them for nine years.

At this point in his career Doc hardly needs another rave review. Friday's show was full of the warmth and humor one has come to expect from this native North Carolinian, and then I don't think Doc could give a bad performance if he tried.

Doc Watson is frequently regarded as a bluegrass musician, but this is both misleading and inaccurate. To peg Watson into just one genre of native American music is an injustice to his ability as a musician and vision as an artist. Doc incorporates a myriad number of styles into his music—blues, gospel, country-western, and old time mountain music, breathing life into forgotten traditions. His dedication, expertise, and endless repertoire of songs makes him a walking repository of Southern music, as well as one of the premier folk artists of our times.

At its deepest, country music is a way of holding to values jeopardized by a changing America. Doc, in the tradition of other great surveyors of country music, reaffirms the values of the Southern working class—God, patriotism, hard work, and a belief in simpler times.

Doc and Merle alternated lead and rhythm guitar throughout the evening, frequently within a song. Merle's banjo and Doc's harmonica were added on several songs.

"Riding on That New River Train" was the opening number of the concert, a traditional favorite which drew a large response from the audience. "Peach Picking Time in Georgia" is a Jimmy Rodgers tune which came from deep within the Appalachian-Carter family tradition. Doc imitated the yodel originated by Rodgers and made famous by Hank Williams.

Doc's rendition of Count Basie's "Going to Chicago Blues" was astonishing. In the best tradition of great urban bluesman such as Muddy Waters and Howlin Wolf, Doc

lowered his voice an octave and growled out the lyrics of a song "so low you might have to get down on the floor to find it."

"Froggin and Courting" was an Elizabethan ballad adopted to a twelve bar blues format, an entertaining novelty tune showcasing Doc's amazing vocal control, and the most humorous song of the night.

Other songs included ballads, minstrel tunes, country blues, western swing—a veritable excursion into Americana. The concert held few surprises. Doc and Merle's picking was flashy without being pretentious. Lack of pretension is one of Doc's greatest virtues. The only disappointment of the evening was that more people did not turn out to pay Doc the respect and attention he deserves.

Preliminaries for the contest were held Thursday night at The Station in Carrboro. Three finalists in each of the two categories were picked to compete for a \$100 cash prize.

Ted Erhart, a Chapel Hill native, took first place in the fiddling category. Dee Davis took first place in the flatpicking category.

Jim Clardy is a staff writer for The Daily Tar Heel.



Doc Watson performs in Chapel Hill ... gave concert with son, Merle

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