

Review of Karl Shiflett & Big Country Show January 25, 2003 Campus Theater
Written by Michael LaRoche

It was standing room only as people from all across the Pacific Northwest, some coming from as far as Vancouver B.C., filled The Shoreline Community College Campus Theater for an evening of true blue, high lonesome Bluegrass music with Rebel Records recording artist "Karl Shiflett & Big Country Show."

Presented as part of the College's 2002-03 Artist & Lecture Series, The Evening hosted by the arts & entertainment board and featured an unforgettable night of Music. KBCS 91.3's Bluegrass Ramble DJ, Tom Keeney kicked the night off introducing the debut of a Seattle original band "The Downtown Mountain Boys."

Comprising of Seattle's top bluegrass Musicians, "Downtown Mountain Boys" kicked off their set with the high-powered, original tune "Back in The Black." Bassist Joe Wilmhoff held down the beat while providing great lead vocals. Guitarist Don Share and Banjo player Dave Keenan chimed in providing perfect three part harmonies.

With a sound bridging the classic to the modern, bearing influences from groups such as the Lonesome River Band, and The New South. "Downtown Mountain Boys" kept the audience in awe. Tom Moran yielded some sweet tremolo on the mandolin during classic songs such as the Jimmy Martin standard "Mr. Engineer," as well as breaking out into rippin' breaks on the band's faster tunes. Paul Elliott set the standard high for fiddle playing that evening with some perfect bow work. One song that set the bluegrass blaze a burning, was the Keenan original banjo tune "Bug Tussle". Keenan's banjo playing was electrifying showing everyone in Seattle just who the top Banjo player around is. Keenan also added twin fiddles and lead vocals to the poignant "please search your Heart."

Downtown Mountain Boys finished off their set with beautiful tune "Carol Ann" penned by Seattle's own Nancy Ricco. Leaving the stage Joe Wilmhoff stated things perfectly by saying "you didn't want them to leave but at the same time you could wait to see the headliner!"

And then the storm hit.

Karl Shiflett and Big Country Show took to the stage with the precision of a musical SWAT team. Rallying around a vintage RCA ribbon microphone, Shiflett cranked the energy into overdrive with the seminal Flatt & Scruggs tune "Don't Let Your Deal Go Down" This IBMA award winning band, hailing from the great state of Texas shows just how powerful a musical force bluegrass is.

Karl provided his voice and rhythm guitar to a backdrop of fast picking, powerhouse musicians. Randy (BoBo) Lindley, now back with the band after a few years hiatus, nearly set his mandolin on fire with a flurry of notes per second that would put any speed metal player to shame. Highlights of the night were the Bill Monroe tune "Delbert's Breakdown" and the "Juke Joint Boogie."

Banjo player Jake Jenkins stunned the crowd with his up tempo (230 BPM or so) banjo original "Jake Brakes", where he employed a technique in which he kept reaching up and changing the tuning on his banjo while soloing in flawless artistry. Jenkins also kept the audience on its feet with a fast spoken little story about some snakes at Miss Potts house with a Pitt to hiss in.

Welcome Addition to the band was the young Andy Ruff on Dobro. Pulling out all the stops on songs like the Brother Oswald number "Dobro Chimes." Big Country Show was rounded off with the energetic fiddling of Chuck Westerman, the Solid bass Of Kris Shiflett, and Special guest this evening Dave Keenan on Snare (what can't that man Play.) Keenan was recruited about ten minutes prior to the evening's event when circumstances left Shiflett without his regular player.

The Energy Of Karl Shiflett is no fluke or nostalgic trip down memory lane, but an extremely dedicated talented group that has the exact heart of bluegrass music beating in their chest. The evening showcased many songs from their Two Rebel Records releases, "Karl Shiflett & Big Country Show" and "In Full Color" However one going into a Karl Shiflett show for the first time, should be aware, this is a full on show. Displaying absolute professionalism as well as musicianship Shiflett delivers a sight to be seen, a evening of entertainment unparalleled, like watching the Opry Live before Nashville strangled the life out Of country music.

Also featured that night were New Songs from Their Forthcoming Rebel Records Release, include a stellar duet with country maverick Jim Lauderdale. When This Album is available you will need to get a copy. Two Sets and Standing ovations later The Crowd Left for the evening totally happy and some how racing before time, and keeping that same sense of warmth and kindness so inherent to bluegrass music, Karl Shiflett Appeared at the exit before the crowd and personally shook everyone's hand and thanked them for coming.