

keeps playhouse hopping

For the second time in as many weeks, Victoria Hall echoed to the rafters as Victoria Playhouse Petrolia introduced yet another ethnic musical feast to a jam-packed house.

At the season opener, The Flying Bulgar Klezmer Band had everyone thumping and clapping to music with Hebrew roots from all over Eastern Europe. It was an entirely different audience who was totally captivated by the Ceilidh from Cape Breton with Bobby Brown and the Cape Breton Symphony Fiddlers presenting rousing music from Scotland, Ireland, Cape Breton Island and — surprise, surprise — a Hungarian gypsy encampment. (More on this later.)

Being a mere "sassenach," I obviously will not have a proper appreciation of the music and, horror of horrors, most of the jigs sounded much the same, as did the reels, but I hope the house full of Scottish, Irish and Cape Breton emigrants will forgive me for my (to them) sacrilege, and allow me to review the individual performers in what was, overall, quite a fantastic show.

Without question, I must begin with Bobby Brown, an immigrant from Falkirk (Scotland) in 1941 at the age of 16, who, as a self-taught musician, has become a virtuoso on the accordion, an excellent pianist and the leader of a group for 20 years, which was formed for the John Allan Cameron TV show. And he's quite a stand-up comic to go with it.

Under Bobby Brown's direction was the quartet better known as The Cape Breton Symphony Fiddlers — John Donald Cameron, Wilfred Gillis, Gerry Pizzariello and Gordon Cote. As a group, playing the jigs and reels of Scotland, Ireland and Cape Breton, they were absolutely remarkable and synchronized to extremes as they played with neither music nor a conductor. For those who are familiar with the music this group plays most of the time, the complicated compositions with their mu-



Neil
Motchan

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sical idiosyncrasies make the achievement of perfection more inconceivable.

A particular mention should be given to Wilfred Gillis, a real old-time fiddle expert who has walked away with competitions, as well as being called upon to judge them.

The other special mention must go to Gerry Pizzariello (a native Cape Bretoner in spite of his name). I mentioned the Hungarian gypsy encampment earlier and it was this enormously accomplished musician who took who took us there. His rendition of Czardas was worthy of a soloist fronting a conventional symphony orchestra.

These two gentlemen were typical of the quality of each quartet member.

Still on musicians, the Scottish Accent (Don Wood on piano, Rob

Wolanski on bass and 12-string guitar and Warren Beesley with drums, guitar and vocal) backed up the fiddlers and their guests very adequately, although I felt Warren's solo vocals were just a little out of character for the show we were watching.

Certainly an exceptional guest was Karen MacIntyre, Ottawa Valley step dancing champion. A cross between tap and clog, step-dancing is unique for its complicated steps and speed. This young lady certainly earned her massive applause each time she appeared.

To round off a show that could have been compared with Don Messer's Jubilee, mature vocalist Christine Scott gave an interesting collection of songs.

I mentioned earlier this was quite a fantastic show and the standing ovation from an appreciative audience showed that there is a definite demand for "ethnic" entertainment.

For the house full of easterners and Scotts, this presentation was absolutely tops and should be brought back again.

Neil Motchan is The Observer's theatre arts reviewer.