



Music

Whole Wheat On the Bar

By Jon Herman

A cold, rowdy, snowy Saturday night at Mad Murphy's always brings back those memories. In spite of the collage of Silverado bumper stickers and International Rugby posters plastered about the panels, the place is still the same. The soft lights shimmer on Jerry Alexander's stained glass windows, while the children of the seventies lay back or boogie to the sounds from the stage. Sometimes it's rock, or country, or swing. It could be folk, or bluegrass, or even those old Irish fiddle tunes. But always, lots of memories.

It is 1977, and new faces show up in Hartford. The Andy May Texas Tabby Crabb Band, a four-piece ensemble, touches on all of the aforementioned musical styles. They play with a serious respect for folk music, while at the same time recognizing the need to put whole wheat bread on the table.

You walk in before the show and see a set of drums, electric and acoustic guitars, bass, mandolin, banjo, fiddle, and pedal steel, and it starts to look a lot like *that* kind of band. The Andy May Texas Tabby Crabb Band, despite their obvious awareness of commercial potential and a repertoire that includes a number of popular tunes, does demonstrate a clear, original approach to their music. "Long Black Veil," "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down," and "Paradise" are treated with such taste and creativity, you hardly realize the songs are covers.

The difficulty in pinning down their music stems from their unusual versatility. Andy May plays electric and acoustic guitars and mandolin, and sings with a somewhat coarse, though sensitive voice. Texas Tabby

Crabb, with a more unruly voice, plays banjo, pedal steel, and fiddle, all in addition to guitars. Bassist Bill Holloway throws in a few vocals, and drummer Chopper Chodorow, whose energy is essential to the urgency of the sound, rounds out the act.

A.M.T.T.C.B. may start off as a basic rock band with two electric guitars, but blink your eyes and Andy has already started sailing through those Irish tunes on his mandolin. Suddenly, Texas Tabby gets going on the pedal steel, toying with the country-rock flavor. The first set ends with Andy on six-string and Tabby on five-string, soaring off through "Mountain Dew," "Dueling Banjos," "Fox on the Run," and "Old Joe Clark."

About a third of their music consists of originals, most of them surprisingly accessible; the musicians are in touch with their music, and with each other. Andy and Tabby both display well-structured, but very playful techniques on their instruments. Their rapport with the crowd couldn't be better; they invite a good time without bordering on the raunchy. Between sets, they mix easily with the people around them, introducing themselves to folks in the bar, talking freely about their musical trips.

They have the material, the energy, the direction, and the versatility to play in a lot of different type settings. Structurally, they possess a musical quality that is sometimes sparse in even the most refined of bands: the ability to use melody as the central element of the songs. Where many bands use solos to work off of the structured rhythms, A.M.T.T.C.B. gives the impression that the melodies are where the creativity begins, with changing rhythms used to enhance them. The same type of creativity is applied



"The sixties are gone and the seventies almost used up. When the eighties come around, the Andy May Texas Tabby Crabb Band will be there to keep folks feeling good." (Linda Cheverton photo)

to their harmonies, sometimes imprudently spacey, sometimes stubbornly traditional.

As they get ready for their final set, Andy looks over at Tabby and says, "How you feeling, good buddy?" Tabby grins and gets ready to play some more. There's a lot more good stuff going down, original tunes,

contemporary favorites, more traditional reels, and yes, even "Diggy Diggy Lo." The sixties are gone for Murphy's and the seventies are almost used up. When the eighties come around, the Andy May Texas Tabby Crabb Band will probably be there to keep folks feeling good.