

# *The* DCMF LISTENER

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## *Saturday*

*(looking back on Friday)*

July 17, 2010

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*To get to Dawson City*, I took bus and train and bus and plane and plane and plane. I saw great lakes, ocean, clouds from above and below. I came from Montreal and now in this town of first and second storeys, of tall firs and gold dust, I try to sense the frontier. Is it here at my hotel door? Is it there, over that hill? Is it past the end of the boardwalk? Where do I cross the invisible line and escape? After decades in the lazy lower country I am North, my compass-needle trembling.

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A woman wraps her arm around me, asks what I am writing. "Song titles? Lyrics?" she asks. I say, "Feelings."

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It's still bright out. It's after midnight and still so bright that I am either dreaming, losing it, or I am in Dawson City. I realize: I am in Dawson City. The sky is blue-silver. It is difficult to know whether we should be happy or serious, awake or tired. Friday's final set is about to begin and still this feels so casual - like we are passing from one thing to another.

But then it is as if Constantines turn on the night.

At the Gazebo, Pat LePoidevin is spooling loops of guitar and fiddle. There is something of a rapids in the way he sings: his convictions do not slow him. These are songs of melancholy, precise and pretty; it is strange to hear them wafting in the open air. We are sitting on blankets, with children playing, and water whispering at our backs. There are a thousand reflections - off bottles, glasses, watchfaces. Pat LePoidevin is in shadow, and the rest of us are in sun.

It is a simpler thing when the Good Lovelies come out. Three smiling girls in dresses, like a page from a picture-book. One of the smiling girls has an acoustic bass, an acoustic bass that looks like an almost comically large acoustic guitar. I am reminded of a knight holding a lance, or of Jughead with an enormous submarine sandwich. I wonder whether she will use her guitar to knock anybody off their horse. I wonder whether anyone has ever eyed her guitar hungrily.

When they play the Boswell Sisters' "Heebie Geebies", it's the clean and easy pleasure of acapella music - three voices holding hands. They make it seem very easy: you just sing at the same time. The craft's all hidden, like yesterday's journeys.

A little while later, Dan Mangan lifts his head and sings, "We're tired all the time, yes all the time." But we're not! We're ready to go! It's sunny and evening and there is

**FREE!**

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going to be rock'n'roll music tonight. We squint in the sun, grinning at Dan Mangan, because he knows it too, here by the river; his saddest songs bounce up over us and scatter on the hillsides.

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"What does squirrel taste like?" Edward asks his hosts.

"Porcupine."

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I have seen two people with large plastic bags of popcorn. After the second, I realize that they must be selling bags of popcorn at the concession stands. Let me say that again: they are selling large plastic bags of popcorn at the concession stands. Whole bags! Whole gigantic bags! Of popcorn! Dawson is paradise!

A sign informs me that I can listen to the Dawson City Music Festival live on 106.9 FM. I can also watch it live, on channel 12. I contemplate returning to my hotel, flicking on the radio, turning on the TV. When joy is sent out through wires, how much is taken out?

When Coolooloosh begin their set, the mainstage tent is a ghost town. The plywood floor deserves plywood tumbleweed. But by the time they finish, the tent is full, jumping, and still crowds are streaming through the gaps in the canvas. The Israelis have positive vibes and sharp horn stabs. They deploy the irresistible strategy of bassline, drums, unencumbered groove. Five hundred people have realized not that they can, or *should* dance to this. But that they *will*. The MC says: "Most definitely."

The same spirit stays for JC Brooks & the Uptown Sound, playing songs about falling in and losing love. I used to believe that the best songs to dance to are the

ones about losing love. I was wrong: the best ones are about falling.

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Friday's best concert is its last concert, its loudest concert. Constantines' guitars roar. The band is big-hearted and vicious. They are here again after six years gone and they are like returning soldiers, pushing through birches, over tombstones, climbing to the stage with their eyes on a splendour. Steve Lambke's guitar-lines are needle-thin. Bry Webb is spitfire, spitsmoke. I remember cliff-faces, furnaces, broken glass. They sound hard, mathematical, like formations in granite.

"It's a great, great pleasure," Webb says. His voice is hoarse. He is singing with such ferocity that all of our voices should be hoarse. We should spend tomorrow with cinders in our throat. We should be pouring kerosene on the floor.

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Yukon Gold is a beer, a potato and a type of gold. As I wait in a ragged thirsty line I wonder whether the three Yukon golds are ever confused. Have prospectors ever panned for spuds? Has a man ever paid for a pint and received a fortune? Do Yukon millionaires ever sober up?

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I am writing this at a time resembling dawn, or the moments before dawn, or the moments after, or perhaps resembling evening. What I can tell you is that I am very tired, the sky is silver, and I have come to a place where there is no night. I am not sure whether I am in an extraordinary city, or merely the place that lives at the end of every Constantines song. 