

Guitarist shows real style

By LENORE CRAWFORD
of The Free Press

STRATFORD — The Stratford Festival-goer, whether he's a true devotee of the bard or just a Stratford devotee, usually likes to argue about a play over some food after he has sat through three hours in the festival theatre. If there's something added to the atmosphere he is ready to like that, too.

When the added something is Chuck Mitchell, who comes from the Southern United States and gives out with a soft drawl, he should like the Black Swan very much. The eating place goes back a few years to when coffee houses were revolutionary in this area. It is located on Market Place, near the Avon Theatre.

The Black Swan is a long flight of stairs up from the street. Other than electricity used for making coffee and tea and for some lighting, the place is so pre-machine-age that Shakespeare seems like a man from the next couple of centuries.

I had been entertained by the Merry Wives of Windsor which used electronic music for sound effects.

At the Black Swan I watched tall, lean and blond Chuck Mitchell work with two guitars alternating them depending on whether he wanted a 12- or six-string one. He plucked them and played them without aid of electricity, and the sound was beautiful, varied skilfully in volume and tempo. He is a guitarist who knows a guitar can be an instrument of greatness as a solo instrument as well as gratifying accompaniment to the voice.

Mitchell is as smooth as his silky flat combed hair. It is a spine-tingling shock therefore, to hear his singing voice take on the richness and depth of plush and the hard edge of steel as easily as it can sooth and hush. The music of Kurt Weiss consequently, is a natural for Mitchell and the poems or lyrics of Brecht go right along with the feelings and the abilities of Mitchell to project the ironic, bitter and yet frequently sensual attributes of Brechtian songs.

Mitchell is poet enough to know when Brecht's German is translated well. He has done some himself with excellent results.

He also has written music that has a completely 1967 quality with no relationship to Weill. And he can sing songs from Swann and Flanders shows with real style.

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