

THE ROWAN BROTHERS

RANCHO NICASIO

JUNE 19, 2005



TRAIN WRECK IN G MAJOR REDEUX

Partook of the gracious hospitality of McGrath's Pub on Friday, and there enjoyed Houston Jones, about whom we have previously written. Saturday dawned through the rose and umber fog of post alcoholic intemperance to give

way to the most delightful cloud-dappled skies after the recent unseasonable rains. Sunday developed into a true Bay Area summer with ground squirrels cavorting along the strand and us rumbling up in the shaking Rumble Mobile to far-off Marin, where they have trees and cows and other strange things growing among the grampus all along the well- matriculated hills.

In Marin, in the Marin as it was of Olde, there sits Rancho Nicasio, a little establishment run by world famous jazz artist Angela Strehli. The collection of farmhouse buildings nestles in the rolling countryside, just about 30 minutes from anywhere with a sign and just about as idyllic a location as one can imagine for the world-class music and food supplied by Angela's elves. Every Sunday the house hosts a few bands and BBQ on the law out back, with room for maybe 200 people at the max. A few picnic tables are to be had for reservation, but the majority simply camp out on the lawn with blankets and folding chairs.

Sunday, we headed out to join a group of Birthday boys and girls and to see our special friend, Lin, who is very much an Elf of the High Elves of Lothlorien. As well as being a 2-time winner and champion against the Big C.

And who should we see but Houston Jones once again performing their version of High Octane Americana.. This time armed with Chojo Jacques and his magnificent fiddle, which can send chills down the spine.



It's a small stage , no more than 30 feet across under an overhang and flush with the lawn. You can creep right up to the edge and gaze at the band, which might feature Leon Russell, Elvin Bishop or any other international celebrity, for Angela's reach extends far and wide, making the locale quite a jewel among the Marin hills.



We like Houston Jones and their free-wheeling style, but there was no question as to whom the people had come to see that day: The Rowan Brothers reunited after a 23 year recording hiatus. The Rowan family began as a rambunctious unit in 1969 with Loren Rowen's "Free Mexican-American Airforce", and developed a strong underground following for the next thirty years. They performed irreverent folk-style music that was distinctly Western and

Californian in particular in sensibility and flavor with extraordinary musicianship. Any time any one of them would perform anywhere in California, the flocks would gather. We have seen a tiny, isolated farmhouse quickly fill up with nearly a hundred people when one of them would perform.

Ensemble, it became quite clear that this is a family devoted to music. Once past the obligatory pieces devoted to perfect technique and sweet harmony, the brothers ripped into some great, old fashioned rocking, tearing up the house, roll. And the obvious enjoyment on their faces indicated how much they loved the music. Which was well appreciated.



The style is Nashville-derivative in the more carefully orchestrated pieces, but it quickly breaks the genre boundaries as the brothers get more excited, evolving into that new amorphous style loosely termed "Americana", with a bit of country, a bit of blues, a bit of rock all melded into one very captivating

performance. The vocal harmonies are exquisite and highly emphasized as the photo would indicate from the mike positioning. This is the music that seems to say, "You know George Bush, you have not a god damned clue as to what the heartland is really about." And that is a good feeling. Because if you really knew what America was about, you would be very dangerous.



Rancho Nicasio has a calendar posted on the web. Find it yourself. Enjoy.