

Mellencamp thunders to the soul

JOHN COUGAR MELLENCAMP at the Saddledome Wednesday night. Attendance: about 17,000.

By James Muretich

(Herald staff writer)

It was only rock 'n' roll at John Cougar Mellencamp's concert at the Saddledome Wednesday night.

Then, again, it was only rock 'n' roll that shook up the music world in the '50s. It was only rock 'n' roll that the Rolling Stones played. And it's only rock 'n' roll that still keeps the fires of musical passion burning in this day and age of prefabricated, vacuous video creations.

In short, ain't nothing fancy to this 36-year-old man from Seymour, Ind., and his music.

Just as in his homage to rock 'n' roll in R.O.C.K. In The U.S.A., there's more than a little Bobby Fuller, Mitch Ryder, Jackie Wilson, Martha Reeves, James Brown and the Young Rascals in the tunes of Mellencamp. In fact, throw in the Stones and a dash of backwoods country and you've got the complete picture of where he's coming from.

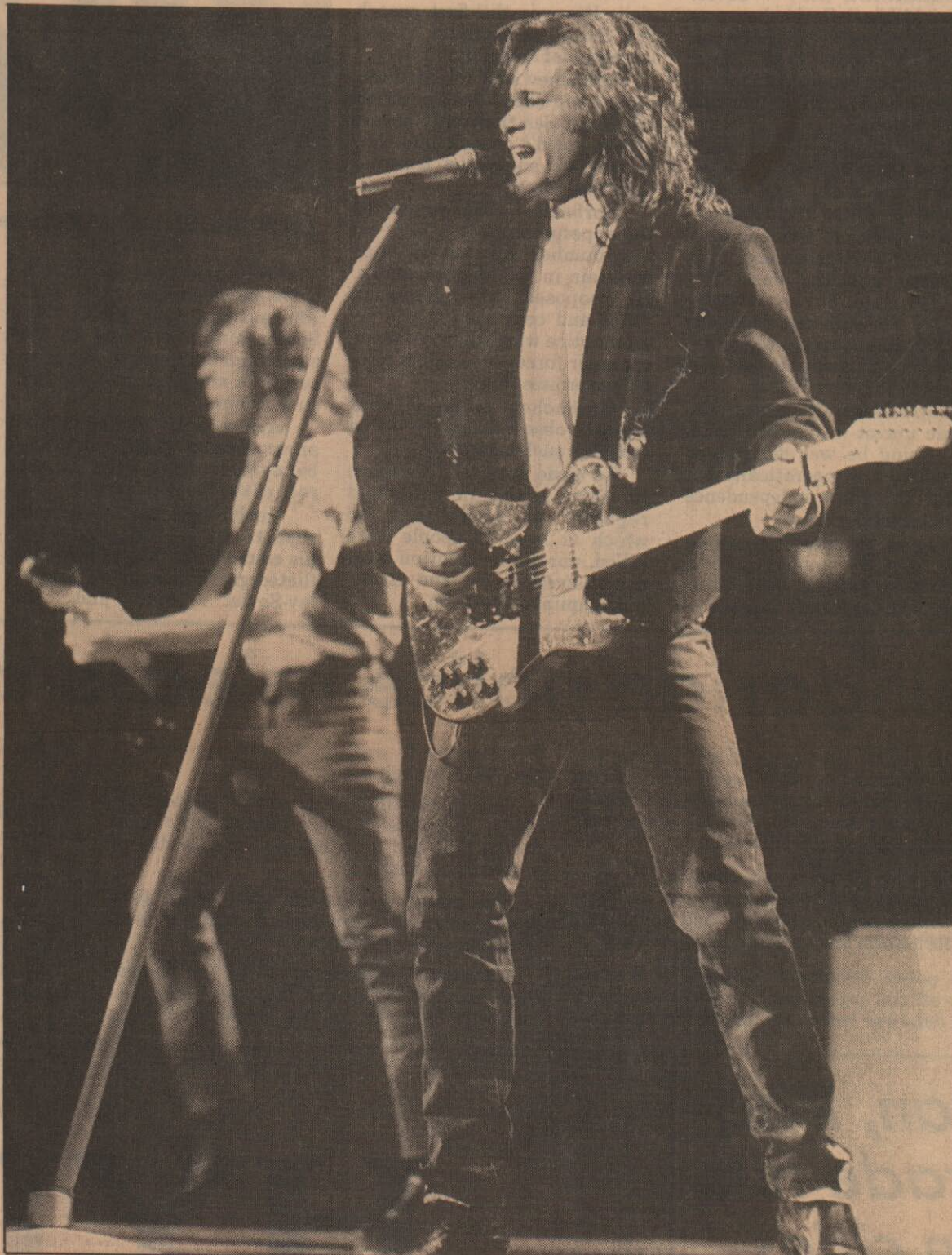
Mellencamp, in concert and on record, celebrates the virtues of simple music as well as the simple ideals of the '60s.

And these elements have come together with a sense of playfulness and purpose in his material of the past few years, with their tales of people hanging on to their jobs, hearts and head space. It's a kind of when the going gets tough, the tough get rockin' music. And it works.

It didn't always do so. The 1983 Rolling Stone Record Guide called Mellencamp a "Meat Head, a boy from Indiana with a chip on his shoulder (and) without any of Springsteen's sense of humor." That was during Mellencamp's angry, flailing away the world stage. But the boy has become a man.

And that shone through loud and clear during Mellencamp's concert at the Saddledome Wednesday night before a sellout crowd.

Mellencamp's material may wander into areas of social criticism, such as *Hard Times For An Honest Man* and *Down And Out In Paradise* or in talking about the plight of farmers, but the accent always falls on a positive



Shannon Oatway, Calgary

ON FIRE: Celebrating virtues of simple music, Mellencamp keeps fires of passion burning

rather than negative note. It was as if he was saying that life may bite the big one too often, but we shall overcome. It wasn't original, but then again saying love's grand isn't exactly original either. It's just true.

So, you can banish all those B-grade Bruce Springsteen comparisons based on appearance

Mellencamp is for real. He sings from the heart, has an exhilaratingly down-home, eight-member band that plays from the heart and is performing songs that have touched the hearts of lots of people across North America.

That's why they were dancing in their seats at the Saddledome

were singing along to the songs and cheering wildly after they ended. And that's why Mellencamp himself was smiling.

It may be only rock 'n' roll but damned if it doesn't speak to the soul.

Thanks John, it was fun