

Hooked on the Northern Pikes

by Alistair Croll

The Northern Pikes put on one of the best concerts in recent Dal history last Friday, October 12th, as they played to 850 Dal students in a packed McInnes room. In their two hour set, they played some songs from their latest album, *Snow In June*, and some earlier material, filled out with tunes borrowed from *The Pursuit of Happiness* and *The Doors*.

The *Gazette* spoke with Pikes drummer Don Schmid (drummer) and guitarist Brian Potvin between sound check and dinner on Friday.

Gaz: Have you guys actually seen snow in June?

Pikes: (Don) Yes, it has happened. It's not that common a thing, but it can — and has — happened. I think it actually snowed pretty much in every month of the year [in Saskatoon].

Gaz: On this album, you spread out the songwriting a lot more than on previous albums. Was that a conscious decision?

Pikes: (Don) It wasn't a conscious thing to say that we need other input; it was a natural thing. I've started writing now — I'm sort of the last of the four — but for Brian it's something when you're around ... it's almost like teaching being with them in a way. You know, we all hang out together and essentially what they'll do is — it'll be much like we are now. They'll have an acoustic and a lyric, and they'll sing us a song. We, from there, decide what sort of feeling we want it to have. Occasionally the guy who comes up with the song will have an idea of where he wants it to go. She Ain't Pretty, when Brian played that, it was pretty obvious about where that should go and we just let it go that way.

Gaz: So you mean you figure out what drums you're going to do on a song from there?

Pikes: (Don) Brian's pretty good with suggestions for drumming 'cause he can sort of play a bit, whereas Merl, it's more of an interesting way that he ... it's through the mouth. It's a sort of rap thing. Everyone's pretty good at offering suggestions. It's a pretty open band the way that we run it.

(Brian) I guess the songwriter will play a sort of director role when the band's putting the song together. Granted, he has a good idea what he thinks might work ... it's always open for suggestions.

Gaz: Is this a job for you guys?

Pikes: (Don) It is in a way, because there is a routine in a way, although the routine might mean being in a different city, but it's still driving to the city, doing a

sound check, having dinner, preparing for the show, doing the show and doing it all again the next time. In that aspect, it's like a job, but it's different in other ways ... we're going to do a video in 2 weeks, and probably in 6 to 8 months we'll go and do the fourth record. It's very diverse that way. It's not always 1 thing going on. If we feel bored with the set, we can put in other songs.

(Brian) It's an all-encompassing job — you sleep with it, eat with it — you do everything all the time all together. It's a job of extremities as well .. you tour 'till you barf, then you go home and you sit around and get bored out of your

Gaz: Is the U.S. market really important to you guys? Do you think it makes or breaks bands and all that?

Pikes: (Brian) It's important for everybody. Canada, we have this complex about U.S. acceptance and whether they like us or not. That's worldwide, especially if you're in the entertainment business in the western world. The U.S. is 50 per cent of the world market. Bands from Norway, England, Canada or wherever want to strike gold down there ... pardon the sick pun, but if the States sneezes, everybody hears. You get a hit down there, usually it's gonna spread worldwide.

of that fact, that we have a happening music scene up here. Like, 3 or 4 years ago it was pretty yucky up here. There was this sort of unwritten rock and roll rulebook where you had to look a certain way and play a certain type of song — I don't want to name names because ... because. (Don) We all know who they are, but it was really pretty gross and that's changed; there's some personality in the music now, there's characters playing music as opposed to these sort of homogenized little puppets. I think it's great. As far as guitar music goes, I think Canada's got everyone beat by a long shot right now.

wouldn't ...)

Gaz: Anything else?

Pikes: (Don) Study hard, always obey your parents [laughs]. Mr. T says. If people are into music, really work on your own songs and record them. As we travel, you occasionally meet a young band. I was talking to one the other night in Moncton — they were quite young, like 18 or 19 — and they were talking about buying a sound system and lights. I sort of talked to them for a while and found out really what their goals were, and they wanted to just make it as a band recording. I said, well, we always just read sound and lights. Put your money into something that will get you ahead — make a demo, send 'em out, do an independent cassette. That's how you're going to get recognized and you get your songs played on the radio. So spend your money wisely. Put it into your music.

Gaz: What's the big medium that broke you guys?

Pikes: (Brian) There was 1 key radio station in Toronto called CFNY — they picked up on our independent records. It was pretty neat hearing that back between Simple Minds and other mainstream artists of that time. It was pretty exciting. (Don) I don't think there's such a thing as a big break — it just seems to be this big collage of hit and misses in this business. (Brian) For every 2 or 3 failures you have a success and it pushes you up ahead. I'm totally convinced that pop music has, A, very little to do with talent and B, so much to do with persistence. It's sort of a waiting game — if you wait your turn, it's eventually going to happen. Be smart, too. You've got to calculate your decisions.

Gaz: What's the biggest you've ever played?

Pikes: (Don) Probably some of the Bowie dates. Yeah — '87, '88 ... it was at the C.N.E. in Toronto. We did the other night in Sackville. We did a concert at the college there, and there were 1600 kids — I think that's the biggest that we've had ourselves. That was fun — to see that many people there to hear the Pikes' songs was quite an experience.

Gaz: Is your tour range expanding? Are you going down to the states?

Pikes: (Don) We're going to Newfoundland. First time in Newfoundland. The record is not released yet in the states. The first 2 are released in the U.S. and we toured reasonably extensively there. But this one is not released there — it should be when it's

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Northern Pikes play at Dalhousie

mind, or you're in the studio for 14 hours a day for 3 months until you can't stand that any more. All pop music is a business of excess and extremities and we're learning that.

Gaz: Are you guys all single?

Pikes: (Brian) Jay's married. I'm engaged.

Gaz: How are you handling the balance between home life and work?

Pikes: (Brian) It's cool. She was brought up in this sort of environment, so she knows ... quite honestly, I sort of laid it on the line when we first started "seeing each other" — it was like, this is my job, it's what I do and when I leave for months on end, that's just the way it is. I'll phone every Sunday and we'll have a nice little talk, but, you know, this is what I've got to do and that's that. You need someone who's obviously pretty independent and reasonably outgoing and who cares about themselves ... who's going to go out and make a life of their own, not just sit around waiting for you to come home — 'cause that's a drag for her.

Gaz: What are you doing in Nova Scotia? Are you starting a tour?

Pikes: (Brian) We're sort of in the middle of it right now. (Don) Yeah. But we like coming out here. It's great. It's one of our favorite places. Good food.

Gaz: Do you find that gets in the way of creativity?

Pikes: (Both) Yeah!

(Don) You find after a while you can see with certain artists some might compromise a bit to get popular down there by doing whatever's necessary. Another good thing about working down there is, it's so big you can create a lot of work for yourself. In Canada, really, if you were to start from one end and go to the other and do it properly, it would only take 4 or 5 weeks because there's not a lot of major cities to play (I'm talking about playing 1 night in a city at a theatre or something). You go through, it's done, and you can't play for a while. So going down to the States is great because if we were even to just do a college tour there, it would take months. There's just so many.

Gaz: Do you think the Canadian scene is healthy these days?

Pikes: (Brian) Oh, yeah. It's really exciting and it's showing too. You've got Jeff Healey, and Junkies, and TPOH, and hopefully us soon, and bands that are happening down there. Whether or not they know if they're Canadian, and whether it's really relevant to them or not, I don't even know if they know or care — I really don't care if they care. The fact remains that we as Canadians (I don't want to wave the flag too high) should be proud

Gaz: Last album you bring in new instruments — the saxophonist up on stage — are you playing around with the field?

Pikes: (Don) Yeah, a bit. We all like music that's diverse that way, and even though we're a basic guitar, bass and drum organization, there's no sense saying we'll never have a piano or female voice or orchestra if it needs to, you know. It becomes exciting in the studio because that's your chance to leave something for good. Live, it's for the moment — you go from night to night, and things happen spontaneously and that's great, but the more I think about it, the more you listen to records, it's permanent. It's kind of neat to actually take advantage of doing whatever you feel is necessary in the song. You can try things — if you want to try a symphony and it doesn't work you don't use it, you know ... Girl

With A Problem's keyboard solo came of the sheer — I don't know if boredom's the word, but always having Brian come up with a solo for each song. It was a change to take a bit of pressure off...

(Brian) [snores] Or put some new pressure on, to think of something else to do.

Gaz: What's the question you've been asked the most?

Pikes: (Brian and Don, in unison) "Where'd you get your name?" (and we'd appreciate it if you