

Sloan returns from the edge

Sloan is so popular, their second album, *Twice Removed*, was voted the best Canadian album of all time. Pretty darned impressive. And their recently released third album, *One Chord To Another*, has been doing rather well too. While it hasn't topped any major polls (yet), it is probably their best record to date, and has resulted in a couple of hit singles. Quite the achievement for a band that was supposedly breaking up a couple of years ago.

Sloan emerged from the Halifax scene back in 1992 when it was still being touted as the new Seattle. Their first release was also the first release on their own record label, Murder Records, but they didn't stay there for long - they were quickly signed to that very major label DGC (owned by the infamous David Geffen), and initiated a signing frenzy on the East Coast. The honeymoon only lasted for one LP as the response by DGC to the second album was lukewarm, and it almost disappeared without a trace. Rumours began about the band's future, and they seemed to vanish from the face of the earth.

But they reappeared again this year (as the initial paragraph should have told you), and band member Chris Murphy was feeling talkative enough to chat about all kinds of Sloan-related stuff.

Exactly what has been going on in the world of Sloan in the last few years - there have been rumours of the band splitting up, being kicked off record labels - give us the true story.

In December 1994, we talked about putting an end to our little ride, but for me, I was more interested in ending the band while things were still positive because the prospect of going on was very daunting. As for the record label, we were at a point in our contract where going on meant making albums three and four, but we just wanted to ask to be left alone. Some people saw it as a way to escape DGC, but it wasn't like that at all. So now we are back on our own Murder Records, but that's only in Canada - we still have to decide what we are going to do in the US. And somewhere in there, we started recording stuff that we thought would be a record for fun, and probably our final record. But things have been going so well, who knows.

Were DGC disappointed with the way that *Twice Removed* was received?

No, they were basically responsible for it. They received it quite poorly, and we had the president of the company telling us that we had to record songs for singles but we felt that it was good the way it was and didn't want to do anything to it. And I'm glad that we left it the way it was, even though it meant that the record company wasn't really interested in it. That led to lack of morale in the band, and we actually ended up petering out and finishing the band. But now that we've bounced back from it, I'm glad it all happened because it means that in the US, anybody who knows about that record knows about it by discovering it themselves, and that is the way to build the best fanbase for a band.

And even though that record seemed to do so poorly, it ended up at the top of a list of best Canadian albums of all time.

Yeah - whatever. I can sort of see how that's logical to that time and how people were voting thought that it was a sort of underdog record - it didn't come out the year that the poll was done so it wasn't too contemporary to vote for. So I can see how it would do well, but number

one of all time is just so silly. It's been embarrassing actually having to deal with that.

So where would you have placed *Twice Removed* in the list?

Oh, exactly where it was, and we would have had *Smeared* come up a little bit higher - just kidding. I would definitely have had Joni Mitchell's *Blue* at the top - it's humiliating to be higher than that. And not to be negative, there are other albums in the top ten that, to me, just look stupid there, and that makes me feel that being number one isn't as big a compliment as I wish it were. I'd like to see how the new record would do next year if it becomes an annual poll.

The new album, *One Chord To Another*, is probably your best album to date as it seems to contain the most concentrated dose of Sloan yet.

Ironically, on *Twice Removed*, I was scrambling around trying to get everyone to focus and to act like a band. I was also worried because the label didn't think we were much of a band. But with this one, I really didn't care, yet it seems to be a much more coherent record.

Have you got some kind of deal to release *One Chord To Another* in the US yet?

No, not really. I don't know what we'll do there. We've talked to Flydaddy a little bit, and they know we're here, but I don't think that they will. I really have no idea.

Do you think there has been a logical progression in the band's sound since your debut album, *Smeared*?

I remember when we recorded that, and the *Peppermint* EP, feeling very excited and also feeling it was really focused too with its grunge-meets-dream-pop sound, but now it feels so very dated. I can't even listen to it any more. I still like some of the songs, but the production is just so...even at the time I felt that we were at the tail-end of that stuff. Yet that stuff is still happening now - that alternagrungepop with heavy guitars sound; I find it disgusting. I can't stand it. But there are so many bands that are still riding that.

Both *One Chord To Another* and *Twice Removed* are much more song oriented than people might have expected after your early work.

At the time, *Twice Removed* may have been commercial suicide, but it did pave the way for the new record. And, if you excuse my blasphemy, I liken the difference between *Smeared* and *Twice Removed* to that between The Beastie Boys' *Licensed To Ill* and *Paul's Boutique* because it was so radically different, but it set up *Check Your Head*, their third record, so perfectly. That trilogy of records made them so credible as artists, so hopefully that is how people will think of us now that the third record has appeared. It has horns and other things that make you giggle and wonder "what are you those guys up to now?" but I hope that we can get away with it now.

When I first wrote about the album, I succumbed to using the word 'Beatlesque'. Are you sick of hearing that yet?

We copied The Beatles - it's true. But we copy a whole lot more than that - basically there is a Who song on there, and other bands like T-Rex and even Creedence. There's a real rip-off of The Rolling Stones too, and Patrick stole his horns from Chicago.

All four band members contribute to the songwriting - do you collaborate, or do each of you have separate songs?

This record wasn't very collaborative compared to *Twice Removed*, but there are still some part



Sloan's mandatory group shot (L-R: Jay Ferguson, Chris Murphy, Andrew Scott and Patrick Pentland)

where we did - in one of Jay's songs, 'The Lines You Amend', I wrote the middle part and Patrick and I sing it. Patrick and I made Jay put the 'ooh-ooh' parts on his other song too.

So there is some input by the other members into each other's songs?

Yeah, but Andrew came in with his songs finished, and he made them himself too. There is a trust that we would allow each other to do that, but at the same time, none of us are completely head-up-their-ass unwilling to rethink things. I really think we have an awesome band as there are all four members who contribute rather than just one main guy and other minions.

And you even switch instruments every now and again just to keep us on our toes.

If Jay or Patrick could play Andrew's guitar parts, I wouldn't switch. But Andrew is such a good guitar player, and I think he gets a bit frustrated back there playing the drums, rolling his eyes at us to tell us we suck. Andrew was just learning to play the drums when we started recording the first album, so he has come a long way - he really is a phenomenal musician. I really do enjoy playing with him. So, I end up going to play drums because neither of the other two

can.

Which of the band members wrote 'Autobiography'?

That was me.

Well, I really must say something about those terrible puns in the song - I was just looking for a quick apology.

[laughter] It's too much, I know.

It is kinda funny, but you have to listen so closely to get it.

It doesn't matter what you are saying - I think that the least important thing is what you say, and the most important is how you say it. But here's my apology - I'm sorry. It's stupid. Every time we play it, Jay rolls his eyes because he hates it. I didn't want it to be too Moxy Fruvous/joke rock, but it is outrageous so I apologise.

Earlier this year, you played with Eric's Trip at their final show - how did that feel as both bands got signed at around the same time.

It's funny because when we started up, I thought that we'd be stepping on each other's toes or something because, at a base level, if you were describing both bands back then to

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