



# Beatin' it on down that line

BY AVI LAMBERT

Fans of the plastic penguin should know, one of Halifax's most unique bands is well on their way.

Well on their way to success, and well on their way across Canada to Ontario to record their first album.

Wooderson — consisting of Christen Hett, Graeme and Tim Walker, Bob Deveau and John Cornwall — have been together for only several days over a year, but you wouldn't be able to tell by their intense, extremely well-connected jams.

It's surprising only two members of the band have had previous on-stage experience. Deveau, the drummer, has previously been in several local bands: Drown, Smotherduck, and Soup. Cornwall, originally from

Oakville, was in a band called Everything's Blue.

Most of the band, save Cornwall on piano, are from the Maritimes.

The band is currently living in their Econoline 150 — a 'mobile existence' to be sure.

Wooderson has been compared to bands ranging from Dave Mathews to Yes, to the Police and Rusted Root.

Deveau noted wisely (with regards to the Yes comparison) that "some comparisons are closer than others".

"People see an acoustic band and say, 'hey it's Dave Mathews... people see a piano and say, 'hey, it's Ben Folds Five,'" said Deveau.

"If people closed their eyes and listened," guitarist Tim Walker said, "they'd probably come up with a totally different idea."

And the idea is a good one.

Wooderson's fan base spans the Maritimes. It is odd, and a little disappointing, that the Halifax band's biggest niche is in New Brunswick. But the band is positive about the Halifax music scene.

A recent gig to kick off the stage at Rye's Deli went well, and the band says the last couple of concerts have been promising.

But all the gigs in Halifax haven't been roses. They say this with a smile.

"The Ward Room show was probably one of our worst," said Tim. The band echoed in a chorus of agreement and head nods.

"Everyone had their backs to us — two people looked our way. Our light show consisted of one house lamp. The bartender [no ill to him] had control of the volume and we don't think he knew. We'd like another chance [to play the Wardroom]."

With studio time and the array of on stage experience in Toronto and the west, the band should return to Halifax sharper than ever.

Graeme assured me the songs were going to get "a lot tighter".

"We're going to get the chance to wrap our head around the songs, and maybe write some new ones."

Evidence of their sound and skill remains to be seen on their forthcoming CD.

Yet, the band doesn't have to worry so much about studio time. They're pretty unlimited because they have their own portable digital studio.

"[There's] nothing but us and the tunes. No distractions. It's a pretty inspirational place where we're going," the band said.

At the start of April Wooderson is to open for the Fat Cats and the Burt Neilson band

during a two-night stint at the Horseshoe Tavern in Toronto, as well as headlining their own show at the Comfort Zone.

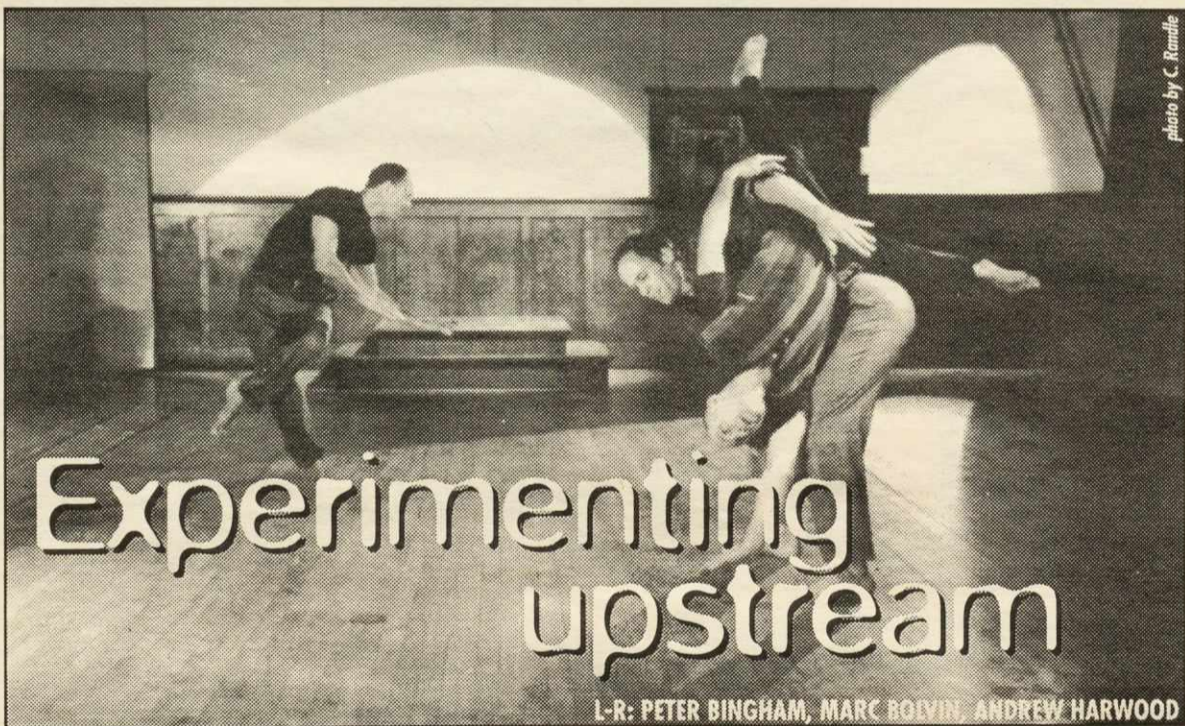
After that, they're headed out to cottage country to record their album for a couple of weeks. They're takin' with them a couple of necessary supplies, if you know what I mean.

If you don't, let me give you an idea. The plastic penguin that appears at each show as their mascot was initially intended to become a novelty toy... bong. Christen, who does the poster and cover art, painted it, and that's how the story of the penguin goes.

Wooderson's not making too many bills right now, but they're recycling and surviving.

They'll be back in six weeks with a facelift and their new CD.

After that, I'll see you in the front row at Red Rocks.



# Experimenting upstream

L-R: PETER BINGHAM, MARC BOIVIN, ANDREW HARWOOD

Dance and music troupe veers away from the mainstream

BY JANET FRENCH

The recipe for a dance performance includes choreography, dancers, choreographers, technical staff, musicians, more choreography, an artistic director and, of course, choreography.

Or does it?

One might assume a dance show lacking any form of choreographic preparation would be a complete mess. However,

Vancouver's Experimental Dance and Music troupe (EDAM) would certainly beg to differ.

On Mar. 19 and 20, EDAM presented two different shows demonstrating what has become known as "contact improvisation".

Born in the 1960s, the idea of "contact improvisation" was simultaneously-but-individually conceived by Steve Paxton in New York and Anna Halprin in San Francisco.

Contact improvisation, described by Edmonton's modern dance guru, Brian Webb, is "dancing with no set vocabulary... using the weight of the body as impetus for movement — not dance steps."

## Friday

EDAM's Friday performance, entitled *The Echo Case*, featured the improvisational talents of EDAM's Artistic Director, Peter Bingham, along with Montreal's Marc Boivin and Peter Harwood. Accompanying the dancers were Coat Cooke and Ron Samworth, maestros of improvised music and sounds, and Robert Meister with on-the-spot lighting design.

When EDAM does improv, it's full-out improv. The only aspects of the performance that were planned were the date, time and location.

The result of placing all these highly-trained, grotesquely-talented individuals in one room to simply "go at it" was surprisingly

co-ordinated. The improvised dance moves had the dancers in close physical contact with each other. Their high level of co-operativity and trust was amazing. Their movement and interaction was fearless, without being reckless, and their movements and emotions bounced off each other to create successful dance scapes.

The improvised musical accompaniment was fascinating as well — almost too fascinating. Cooke and Samworth almost overshadowed the dancers.

They produced an astounding array of noises using only their instruments, props and voices. The instrumentalists, along with the lighting designer, were sitting on stage in plain sight. Eyes in the audience wandered from the dancers to peer closely at the three on stage, wondering how the curious noises were being produced.

## Saturday

Saturday's performance integrated EDAM's impromptu movement with the compositions of Halifax's own Upstream Ensemble.

Each of the seven participating musicians brought one composition to share, in which each individual led the small orchestra.

This was no typical orchestral accompaniment. The musicians wandered about the stage, with the dancers maneuvering around them, or actually interacting with them. Even the music itself was a special breed, for it was more of an exploration of the range and

diversity of sounds which instruments can make, rather than melody and tune.

Again, EDAM's on-the-spot movements were smooth and confident, leaving the audience amazed and questioning the idea that this choreography was entirely unplanned. Although each dancer's unique interpretations of the music were compelling, the interactions between dancers and the consequent quick thinking on their behalf was the most impressive aspect of the show.

The dancers and musicians utilized and manipulated the space in the theatre well. The stage has an upper balcony and one of the Ensemble's numbers had Peter Bingham fearlessly draping himself over the railing of this balcony, directly over the musicians. This was somewhat nerve wracking for the audience, who knew that this stunt had not been rehearsed. Musician Coat Cooke soon joined him, teetering dangerously over the railing with his saxophone.

EDAM certainly lives up to its name. The performances were definitely experimental. The collaboration with the Upstream Ensemble was successful, and the musicians were good sports about the close and unexpected interactions with the dancers. Most importantly, the performance was a lot of fun, both for the performers and the audience. It is exciting to see professional performers that have taken a step away from the pretentiousness of the mainstream dancing world to create performances that are both unique and playful.

photo by C. Rendell