

**Wednesday, 6 p.m. Gravitee**  
 State Champs/Trike/Special Guests  
 (hmmmmm...)

The first gig of the Pop Explosion was arguably the best. Why? Well Sloan of course, but more on that later. **State Champs** opened up the third incarnation of the festival at the Gravitee Club on Gottigen (after the Khyber had been deemed a fire trap, yet again). Their set was short, interesting, and fun. The Pavement and Superchunk influences were undeniable, but there is enough originality in their songs to make them a local band worth serious attention.

**Trike** were up next and were a bit of a disappointment. Their songs were eerily similar to Eric's Trip's harsher stuff. Except for "Rocket," where Melanie's vocals really shine through, it was a pretty monotonous set.

"**Special Guests**" (Sloan) were next and they put on one of their best shows ever. This was their first Pop Explosion and they cleaned house. They played requests, b-sides, and a cheesy 70's rock cover. It wasn't until well after the show was over that I realized that they hadn't played "Underwhelmed." It didn't matter either. They played a full-on show that blew out the lights three times and almost blew the PA.

Who knows when Sloan's last gig will be? I thought that it was in the summer. Lucky for us, it wasn't.

MIKE GRAHAM

**Wednesday, 10 p.m. Birdland**  
 Cool Blue Halo/Squirrel/Chinstraps/  
 Plumtree/The Sadies/L'il Orton  
 Hoggett

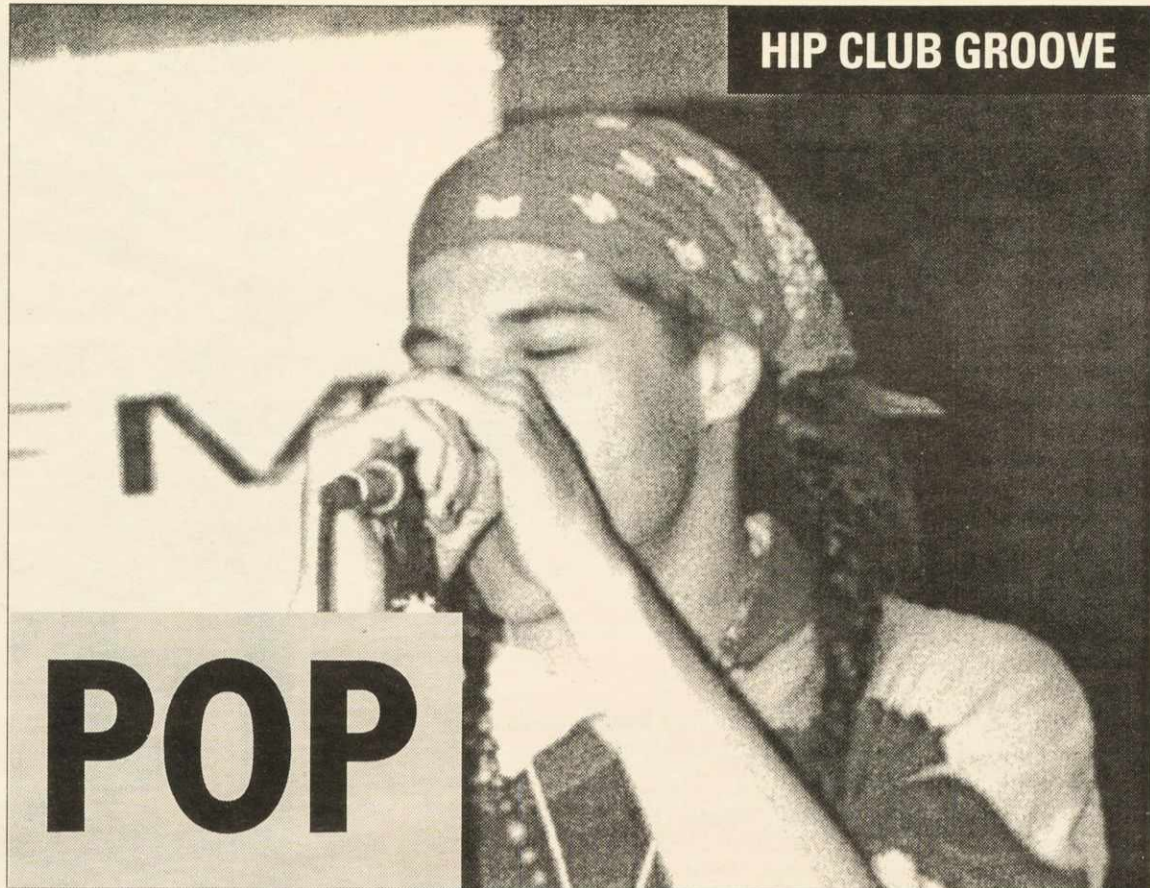
Some friends and I made the five minute hike from the Gravitee Club to the Birdland Cabaret, to see **Cool Blue Halo** play a great set of very melodic, Big Star-type pop songs. This band has been switching members around for quite awhile. Hopefully this incarnation will last because they sound more solid than ever.

Next up was **Squirrel** who hit the stage with a THUD. They really rocked out and got the crowd's attention.

Local band, the **Chinstraps** followed and put on a hilarious show. With their voices modulated, it was like hearing Mickey Mouse singing early eighties hardcore punk. Fast, furious, and



PLUMTREE



POP

hilarious.

CKDU chart -toppers **Plumtree** were teaching their fill-in bassist (5 string fretless!) some of their songs during the set. Anyway, they came off as pretty well-rehearsed and they were having a good time. I think that Plumtree are about the only band around with no use for a distortion pedal. Very refreshing and fun. Happy music!!

**The Sadies** played a strange set which didn't seem to have any direction. They'd go from disaffected garage rock, to Shadowy Men-type stuff to straight ahead rock, to whatever. They went from interesting to boring musically, but they were completely boring to watch.

**L'il Orton Hoggett** capped off the show with some good old fashion country. Screw "new country". Hank Williams would've been proud. Garth Brooks wouldn't get it.

MIKE GRAHAM

**Thursday, 1 p.m. Gravitee**  
 Fire Engine Red/New Brunswick/  
 Strawberry/Preppy Relatives/Elliott  
 Smith

Well, I only got to see two shows at this one. First up was Calgary's **Fire Engine Red**, who on their way to Halifax had some woman roll her window down and yell, "Why don't you go back to fucking Calgary, you fucking fools!" for no apparent reason. So much for "Halifax hospitality," eh?

Anyhow, they put on a great show for an appreciative, yet small, crowd. I really liked their sound...at times sort of a Buffalo Tom meets a really hard Big Star. The songs were short rockers with good vocals and some nice harmonies.

Next were Dartmouth's **New Brunswick**. The first time I saw these guys, they were great! However, this show lacked something I couldn't put my finger on. It was good, but something was missing. Maybe they had an off day.

That's all I got to see that day. I found the afternoon shows to be inconvenient. Most kids were in school, and people like me sleep through them to make up for the previous night. I think they should work on this for next year.

SHANT PELLEY

HIP CLUB GROOVE

EXPLOSION

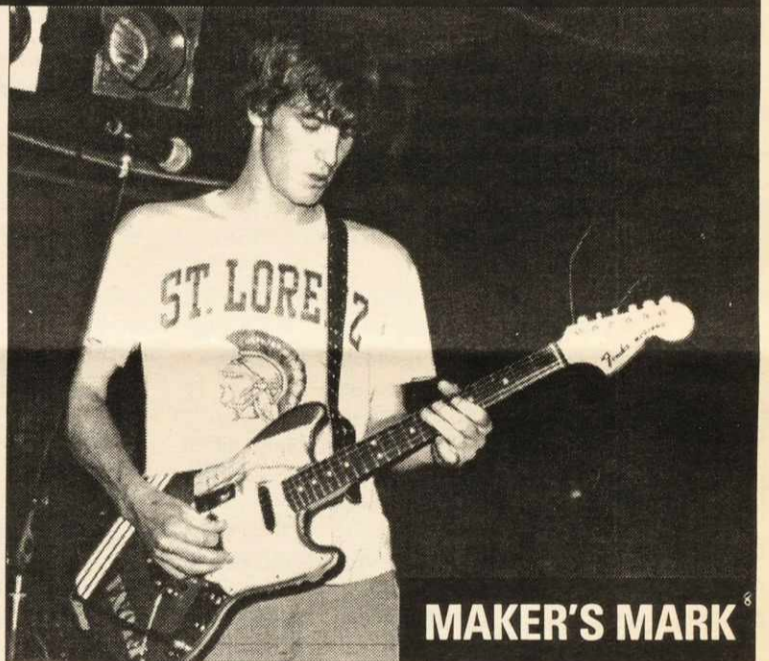
**Thursday, 6 p.m. Gravitee**  
 (HALTOWN MELTDOWN)  
 Six-Too/Ruffneck/Flex & Withdoc Jo-Run/Stinkin' Rich/Hip Club Groove

The first official act of the show — after some incredible impromptu mixing by DJ Jo-Run — was **Six-Too**, who apparently used to be a member of Hip Club Groove back in Truro. He has good rhymes and smooth flow, but sometimes gets bogged down when he tries to say unrhythmic phrases in his more personal tunes.

**Ruffneck** was up next and he sat and talked for a while before throwing out some verse. He's got a great sense of humour, especially when it comes to his personal history in rap ("I lost to an R&B singer" and "If I was a gangsta I'd have a record deal"). A very animated performer, Ruffneck had a quick, familiar voice that is easy to understand. He has fun on stage and that feeling transmits to the whole audience.

**Jo-Run** got out from behind the tables to do a set with **Flex**, who made the crowd get up off its feet. Eventually, some even started dancing and break-dancing. Jo has a nasal, Weird Al-like voice that contrasts in a very cool way with Flex's smooth one. As a duo they went back and forth, one accenting the others raps, and kicking out carefully chosen rhymes and great choruses ("The Metro Politician of the Microphone"). These two had a fabulous freestyle, the guitar solo of hip-hop. They were quick with a fresh line and flowing at all times.

Clad in leather lace-up pants, sunglasses, and a tamed goatee, **Stinkin' Rich** brought his own visual show with him from home. A TV showed the gore movie Dead Alive while Rich laid down his complex, involved raps at both slow and fast tempos. Rich (aka DJ Critical) still seems a little nervous on stage but his MC-ing is starting to catch up to his DJ skills. The music was fresh and Rich even did a falsetto on



MAKER'S MARK

the chorus of his last song that was classic.

Weird Moment Of The Week: Rich doing "Colors" by Ice-T from the movie of the same name.

Headliners **Hip Club Groove** were on last with a short set of mostly new material, one of the best of which is "Jealousy." Good DJ-ing by Moves, and Cheklove and MacKenzie were their usual selves (except the Underdog seemed a little too sober for an HCG show). Chek had an amazing freestyle as usual, asking for topics and getting "Derek's Hairy Nipples" which he proceeded to do with his usual flair. When he choked on his gum he put that in the rap, too. A short performance, and not their best, but that's still pretty good.

TIM COVERT

**Thursday, 10 p.m. Birdland**  
 Crappo 2/Made/Coyote/Thrush  
 Hermit/The Maker's Mark/Elliott  
 Smith

Thursday at The Birdland, for the second night of the Pop Explosion, some of the best and brightest tuned up. **Crappo 2** from Chicago opened the show. Laura Borealis from the original Crappo was supported by three Thrush Hermit members. There were

quirky songs mixed with melancholic love ballads which went well in consideration of just a few hours of practice. Laura is a strong writer/performer for any number of Crappo projects which she may put together.

**Made** is a Toronto-based band which seemed well-seasoned although the only extraordinary thing was that the lead singer/guitarist picked his nose once between songs.

Chris (feel the power) Logan fronts the consistently best-dressed **Coyote**. Logan breaks a string and howls through "Good God Damn" and I'm thinking that "this is what the world is waiting for". The guitar refinement didn't impede the otherwise inescapable angst from this great sounding trio, although this Thursday night they seemed a bit tame.

**Thrush Hermit** is the most entertaining band around — bar none. They play their instru-

ments with little or no respect for personal safety. With a penchant for turning the rest of the venue into a wax museum, Thrush Hermit is acrobatic musical splendour. Thursday's show was really here and the crowd evidenced that on the dance floor.

Up next was **The Maker's Mark** fronted by Andrew Scott of **Sloan**. For their first Halifax show, they opened with a little mid-western blues thing before a ka-blam! Great sounding original material, to which, the audience all bobbed their heads in approval.

**Elliott Smith**, I think, had been long upstaged by the third and/or fourth act of the evening. However, they did play well, and the addition of a second drummer was a neat surprise.

GEOFFREY INESON



SLOAN