

Siding with god

Michael Franti speaks out at Cafe Mokka

From his first "Rock rock y'all" to the last powerful line of his a cappella performance, Michael Franti, the lead man of the funk/soul/rap outfit Spearhead, exuded enthusiasm and left his presence felt. Not one of the invite-only heads present at Cafe Mokka on Monday night was left static. Since the show was not open to the public, not all present were necessarily fans of the 10-year music veteran beforehand. However, his inspired performance, coupled with the close confines of the coffee shop, insured everyone was duly impressed. Franti, formerly of the alternative rap group Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy, has been noted for both his positive music as well as his controversial lyrics concerning race, commercialism and politics. While he ate a bowl of vegetarian chile and a bagel, I managed to pester him with a few questions.

BY SOHRAB RARID

Gaz: Besides the Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy and Spearhead, and of course this spoken word gig tonight, I've heard you do a wide variety of other projects: producing other groups, the remix on the New Groove jazz album, etc. Are you consciously pushing musical boundaries, or is it all a natural progression?

Franti: I just get bored. I'm like, "What's the next shit, I'm over this." And also when you deal with consciousness, you have to bring it to where people are at, you can't do the same record every time.

Gaz: Lyrically, you've pushed boundaries socio-politically. When you write, is it a matter of changing people's minds, or do you just write whatever you feel?

Franti: As far as I know, music has never changed anybody's

mind about anything. What happens is you have emotions, and music helps it come out. You hear Sade, you wanna go wreck with your girlfriend. People hear Kurt Cobain and wonder what's going on, but to kids growing up in the suburbs, their parents always telling them what to do, that's the most important emotion for them, being an individual and expressing themselves. To me there's no emotion that's right or wrong, and music helps get these emotions out.

Gaz: Do you think it's possible for the Spearhead "concept" and "style" to blow up? Do you want it to?

Franti: I'm interested in having a career, and so far I've sown seeds and I've grown roots. What I try to do is bear fruit, but I don't want my tree to die. I don't want my tree to grow up real big and have tonnes of fruit and have even-

ryone pick it off all at once, and have no leaves and branches left. I want my tree to go steady. In time it will be a strong tree that will give a lot of people employment, and also inspiration.

Gaz: Spearhead is such a diverse band, one that manages to blend various styles more cohesively than a lot of other bands that try to. How do you manage to keep it tight while creating the music?

Franti: It's really just who feels it; knows it. If the groove is happening (in the studio), you can sense it, if not, you notice people's heads aren't bobbing.

Gaz: After Disposable, I think a lot of people were surprised to see such a sexually implicit video as "People In The Middle" (the very first Spearhead video). Do you think that was a departure from your previous philosophies?

Franti: Not really, I wanted to

do that specifically. I don't always want to talk about politics. I wanted to do a video about sex. I don't find anything wrong about sex.

Gaz: I remember you saying years ago that the biggest problem with Disposable was that it wasn't getting to your target market, it wasn't getting to black people. However, you've toured with U2, Ben Harper, Brand New Heavies...all exceptional artists, but do you think you were getting at black people any better?

Franti: I've always been an artist who's said, "Get me to where I wanna go. Let me do my thing." If the way that I have to get there is to do a show with KRS One in San Francisco, then we'll do it. If we have to do a show with Living Colour in Alabama cause they are big there, then so be it.

Gaz: How much do you care about your audience's background? Who is your target market?

Franti: I don't have a target market. I'm not on the side of black or white, I'm on the side of God.

Gaz: Speaking of race, a lot of people are aware of your upbringing (black child adopted by white parents). How does that affect your musical style and message?

Franti: I'm a human being, so all that I am is a sum of my experiences, but it's not solely that. I'm not solely race, I'm not solely environment, I'm not solely destiny, and I'm not solely DNA. It's about my soul. My music comes from heart. I was put into a family, and walked through life in that family, but I never really fit into that family. So that gave me the opportunity to really follow my own path. When I was young, I didn't really know what that plan was, but as I grew, and I grew with music, I learned the path that I'm supposed to be on.



Birdland's migration denied

BY MARK REYNOLDS

Objections by a posh downtown apartment complex and the priests of a nearby rectory have effectively blocked the Birdland Cabaret's application to find a new home.

The Nova Scotia Liquor Licence Board denied the application to relocate the Birdland in a thirty-page decision on Friday. The proposed move met strong opposition from local residents, chief among them the Barrington Gate apartment complex (home of two provincial cabinet ministers) and the residents of the rectory of St. Mary's Basilica. Both buildings are across the street from the proposed site.

The Birdland had been planning on moving into a space on Barrington Street left vacant by the closing of the Studio, a once-popular progressive dance bar. The Birdland's current location in the Trade Mart building has been interfering with the operation of the CIBC's 24-hour call centre in the same building. The club's lease expired in July, but since then has been renewed on a month-to-month basis.

Greg Clark, owner of the popular live music venue, remains optimistic that a compromise can be reached.

"We're thinking that we will re-apply. We're going to talk to the

neighbours," said Clark. "We're looking at maybe closing the Barrington entrance at 9 o'clock." He explained that the proposed club would have a second entrance on Granville street, which would be some distance away from the Barrington Street residences.

"I'm not a hard-headed fellow against a good time," — Father Martin Currie

Clark said that the Birdland is able to extend its current month-to-month lease until the end of March, and perhaps beyond.

"I think the bigger story here is what is the relationship going to be between residents and commercial tenants downtown," said Clark, who feels that, as there are a limited amount of spaces available in the downtown core, residents who wish to live in the area should expect commercial neighbours such as nightclubs to be present in the area.

The liquor licensing board would seem to agree with him. In a decision they wrote in favour of the Grafton Street Restaurant Limited in 1994, they stated that, "Since there are many licensed establishments in the area it is impossible for the board, or the ob-

jectors (in this case St. Paul's Church), to state categorically that the offenders come from one specific establishment." The board in this case went on to argue that while there is a problem of rowdy patrons leaving bars, adding another bar would not change the situation since the problem already exists.

"I'm not a hard-headed fellow against a good time," said Father Martin Currie of St. Mary's Basilica, who spoke against the application.

Currie explained that the rectory, which is home to six priests, already experiences problems with patrons of local establishments.

"You can see the green on the walls," said Currie, referring to where drunken revellers have urinated on the walls of the house. Currie also explained that the private parking around the house is constantly being used, and that they have had to call the police in order to disperse people.

Currie felt that there was no way that the owners of the Birdland would be able to control the additional four hundred people on the street after the bar closed.

"The Birdland's promoting music, that's all good, it's just location," said Currie. "I guess I'm just one of those people: 'not in my back yard'."

Explosive eroticism

BY ALEXIS MILLIGAN

How can I describe it? It was erotic. It made you shift in your seat. It tested your comfort zone by making you feel at ease and then rapidly twisting the mood with black humour. It was funny. It was reality.

Blue Angel-Kabarett is a 50-minute piece of dance and drama choreographed by Andrea Leigh-Smith and presented by the Irondale Ensemble Project. The show takes you to a Kabarett stage in Berlin during the late 20s and early 30s; the time of Germany's great depression. By using the dance style of the period and the sensual movements of the Kabarett, Leigh-Smith links elements of history with the darker side of

our own reality. The program aptly describes it as "explosive eroticism, and theatrically captured through smokey images of the concert/cafe dance styles of pre-war Europe."

Even though I was laughing during many of the humorous moments, through the smoke I could catch glimpses of the excesses of our own society. This is a tour de force performance; funny yet powerful. I highly recommend it to anyone interested in dance.

Blue Angel-Kabarett runs from February 6-9th at 8 p.m., with a Sunday matinee at 2 p.m., at The Church, 5657 North Street. It is a pay by donation event with advance tickets available at Frog Hollow Books and by calling 429-1370.

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