

Vancouver's 54.40 shines too...

Local talent moves up with powerful sound

Neo-A4
Dinwoodie, February 4

review by Nate LaRoi

In Vancouver it would have been NEO-A4 opening up for 54.40, but at Dinwoodie Saturday night it was quite the other way around and, as circumstances would have it, just as well. 54.40 quite simply was overshadowed; they weren't bad, though, just a trifle below expectation for a band with a highly regarded 1982 EP, *Selection*, and a brand new album, *Set the Fire*, to their credit. Of course, the Dinwoodie audience, in typical fashion, wasn't exactly supportive of the warm-up act either, no more than a half dozen or so bodies ever venturing out onto the dance floor at any one time.

Nevertheless, the Vancouver quartet, using both acoustic and electric guitars and occasional trumpet and keyboard synth, did show off some strong new material, most notably "Set the Fire", though their vocals weren't always particularly tuneful and their sound was excessively bass heavy. Acoustic guitars are always good to hear in this age of electricity, and decked out in cowboy hats, 54.40 made out as wild west heroes even as Darryl Neudorf's parade ground snare, attacked with relentless frequency, imparted a military flavour to the proceedings, a flavour underscored by the revolutionary fervor sometimes implicit in Neil Osborn's lyrics (i.e. "Tell the Truth"). Canada's equivalent to the Alarm? Not quite, but wait and see.

For Neo-A4, pushing an impressive new EP and struggling to break through to a larger audience before over-saturating the limited "alternative music" crowd, Dinwoodie was an important gig. Thankfully, the audience turn-out was very good and the three man Edmonton band, obviously well "up" for the occasion, turned in a very tight performance, delivering both depth and intensity.



Neo-A4's Joel Anderson, the band's "secret weapon".

On stage, Neo-A4's secret weapon is drummer Joel Anderson, possibly the best drummer this city has (with apologies to Dave Gilby). Hitting hard and displaying an uncommon talent for syncopation, Anderson provided a tunnel of reverb you could feel at chest level. Ric Johnston's guitar-

guitar synth, in turn, achieves if anything more power in concert than on record.

Neo-A4's vocals convey real tension and urgency, although amid the distraction of the aural experience it was often difficult to grasp what the songs were about - a pity when the band spends so much of its time

on its lyrics. And while Neo-A4's music is by no means inaccessible, it is sometimes difficult to dance to, especially when the band slows its tempo or breaks into nonconventional rhythms.

A band of little patience for poses or fashion, Neo-A4 are musicians first, performers second. Their 4-song EP, *What's Up*, with its simple black and white cover and with its conspicuous absence of any photos of the band members, is an obvious plea for judgement on music value alone. And while Neo-A4 lacks the stage show professionalism of Darkroom, their *What's Up* eclipses Darkroom's *Pressure* handily.

Recorded at Damon Studios with Rick Erickson, it may be the best produced EP the local alterperative music community has yet produced. "Feel the Unknown", building off Ric Johnston's choppy and terrifically catchy guitar hook and powered by John Tidswell's heavy bass thump is Neo-A4's at its danceable best. Urging the listener to open him-herself to experience, to feel the unknown as opposed to think the unknown, it says a lot in very few words.

Equally powerful is "Brave New World," where Ric Johnston's guitar synth, an instrument sounding quite unlike the conventional six-string, glides about mysteriously as Joel Anderson hammers out big beat rhythms with machine-like power and precision. "A Painting is Torn" is successful in its exploration of unusual rhythms, while only "Test the Night", despite its synthesizer flourishes, falls short, carrying on a little too long.

With Facecrime, Darkroom, Subtle Hints, and Pretty Rough all on the move also, 1984 is shaping up as a banner year for Edmonton music. And while Neo-A4 are clearly less commercial than any of the four, they are also in many ways the most intriguing, and, for the Edmonton new music movement, may well be the shape of things to come.

Photo: Bill Ingles

NOTICE: S.U. GENERAL ELECTION FRIDAY 10 FEBRUARY



ELECTION RALLY

Wednesday 8 February 12 Noon SUB Theatre
(Doors open 11:30 hr. Classes cancelled from 1200 to 1300 hr. on this occasion only.)

ADVANCE POLL

Thursday 9 February 1000 - 1500 hr.
SUB, Main Floor (East)

POLL LOCATIONS:

| Building | Area | Hours |
|------------------------------|---|------------------|
| CAB (Northeast) | Northeast Corner | 9:00 - 17:30 hr |
| CAB (South) | Pedway to Engineering | 10:00 - 16:00 hr |
| Chemical-Mineral Engineering | Main Entrance | 10:30 - 14:00 hr |
| Clinical Sciences | Second Floor by Escalators | 10:30 - 13:30 hr |
| Corbette Hall | Second Floor Main Foyer | 10:30 - 13:30 hr |
| Education | Lounge Area (North) near E.S.A. Offices | 9:00 - 17:30 hr |
| Faculte' St. Jean | Salon des Etudiants | 9:00 - 13:30 hr |
| Fine Arts | 2nd Floor - HUB Pedway Entrance | 9:30 - 16:30 hr |
| H.M. Tory | Main Foyer | 9:00 - 17:00 hr |
| HUB (North) | Purple Lounge | 9:30 - 17:30 hr |
| Law Centre | Main Entrance East Side | 10:30-13:30 hr |
| Lister Hall | Outside Cafeteria | 11:00 - 18:00 hr |
| Medical Sciences | Second Floor Near Vending Area | 10:30 - 13:30 hr |
| Rutherford | Upper Concourse | 9:30 - 17:00 hr |
| SUB | Main Floor (East) | 9:00 - 18:00 hr |
| V-Wing | Vending Area | 9:30 - 16:00 hr |

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