

# "It just sounds like a good time"

Melissa Etheridge in Halifax

BY RICHARD LIM

Ashley MacIsaac/Melissa Etheridge  
Metro Centre

I only need nine words to write this review: On March 24, Melissa Etheridge kicked a little ass.

However, I am bound by the code of wanna-be journalists: always describe, in exhaustive detail, events long past so that your readers might become jealous that they were not there as well.

**The Opener:** I could've sworn I got to the concert with a couple minutes to spare, but before I even entered the building, I could hear the inimitable fiddling of Ashley MacIsaac. My friends tell me that: (a) he started ten minutes early; and, (b) he played his two biggest hits first thing. I was disappointed, partly because I was looking forward to hearing the joke he'd made at his Toronto performance about Cape Breton's population being comprised of "fiddlers and fairies."

Nevertheless, I still caught over twenty minutes of high-speed sawing on that poor orchestral instrument, including a great version of "Stayin' Alive." With snapped bow strings and wisps of smoke drifting from his fiddle, MacIsaac introduced his last song thus: "This is your last chance, for you to get up and dance. I am wearing no pant, this is the Devil in the Kitchen." I suppose I should mention at this point that he had changed into a kilt.

**The Headliner:** Melissa Etheridge played for more than two hours straight, her voice never losing its power or edge. She worked her way through most of her biggest and best songs, drawing heavily from her two most recent albums. Unlike most other performers, Etheridge ignored that irritating rock star convention of saving the best songs for

the anticipated encore: hits from *Your Little Secret* and *Yes I Am* such as "I'm the Only One" were sprinkled liberally throughout the entire performance.

"Hello, Halifax!" I think Etheridge was entered in some sort of competition, where you see how many times you can name the city or province in which you're playing and still get a huge round of applause. She also got a kick out of the region's name: "The Maritimes. (Puts her hands on her hips) It just *sounds* like a lot of fun!"

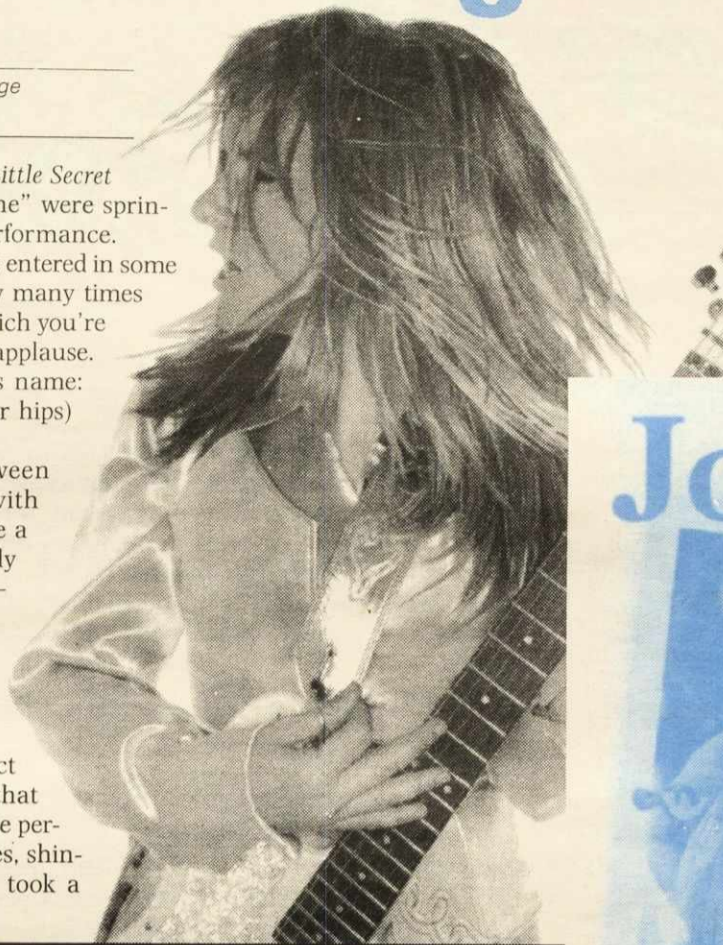
**The Band:** To differentiate between Etheridge and the other musicians with whom she shared the stage seems to be a somewhat artificial distinction. She clearly regards them as equals, not back-ups — they even took an arm-in-arm bow after the first encore — so it seems more appropriate to regard her as part of the entire band. Unfortunately, their names completely escaped me, so I am unable to demonstrate the same respect for them in this article. All I can say is that the lead and bass guitarist, as well as the percussionist, put in excellent performances, shining particularly bright whenever they took a solo turn.

**The Acoustic Portion:** Reaching back to her self-titled debut, Etheridge stood alone, centre stage, and delivered an emotive rendition of "Occasionally," accompanying herself by drumming on the back of her guitar. For "Chrome-Plated Heart," she was joined by the rest of her band, and the audience was treated to the most innovative drum solo I have ever seen: the guitarists formed the chords but held out their instruments to the drummer, who proceeded to play out a complete melody on the lead, rhythm, and bass guitars using his sticks on the strings.

**The Encores:** Etheridge's voice never flagged during the

evening, as she proved once again that she is easily one of the strongest and most passionate vocalists on the music scene today. For the first encore, she ripped through "Like the Way I Do," and the four musicians each took a turn showing off during its extended bridge. After the band took their bow, the Metro Centre began to empty, but those stalwarts who stayed to cheer and clap for several more minutes were appropriately rewarded with a second encore, just as good as the first.

**Conclusion:** You should've been there. If you were, wasn't it a great concert? If you weren't, that's too damn bad. Not my fault.



Jo Sky

## Conjuring emotion

*Maxillopods in my Pocket.*

Jo Sky  
Independent

Dalhousie student Joanna Mirsky, otherwise known as Jo Sky, released her debut cassette last month at the Grad House. *Maxillopods in my Pocket* is a harmonious collection of material, in the working for some time, that has finally been produced into album format.

Sky, for some time solely a casual performer, is one of those artists gifted enough to be able to weave a storyline into music in much the same way as the ballad artists of old. Each song on *Maxillopods* is a carefully crafted journey that recounts the true-life experience of individuals from all walks of life. This is the real charm of the album — each song has a ring of truth within the verse. This honesty encourages within the listener a sense of reflection.

Most artists today attempt to hit the listener over the head with content and conviction, often overwhelming the audience in the process. Sky's success lies in her ability to conjure emotion, rather than manufacture it (yes, there is a difference, folks). Her lyrical style and vocal harmonies give the listener complete emotional freedom. One can create their own mood to surround each piece.

"Freedom Road," written while Sky was travelling in Europe, encapsulates the sensations felt by anyone travelling abroad: the awe of discovery within a new environment and the joy of being unattached from the strains of societal commitment.

"No Fear," about a homeless man encountered on the streets of Europe, captures a sense of personal strength few of us will ever know. The song describes strength under overwhelming circumstances, circumstances which could crush even the most secure of individuals.

"Heaven on a Mountainside" recounts being in the awe-inspiring Swiss Alps. The song describes the dichotomy between the seeking of natural beauty for the sake of retreat (nature for "nature's sake"), and the coveting of nature for the intangibility intertwined within its beauty.

Jo Sky performed in the Green Room for a Women's Day Benefit this month, playing to a full house of captivated listeners. I also had the privilege to see Jo Sky perform last month at the Grad House. The audience was large, but intimate. Here was someone who we all knew, had had coffee with, bummed smokes off of (or given smokes to), and who was now making her break. The show was wonderful: one woman, one guitar, one voice, and the audience was at her feet. The whole room was focused on her and her message. I have always been impressed by those capable of climbing up on stage, alone, to create a mood from within, a mood which is transported and accepted by all. If you ever have an opportunity to see Jo in that kind of setting, don't hesitate.

*Maxillopods in my Pocket* is a charming, emotional album and a wonderful debut. It's well worth the investment (it's cheap, I'm told) and you'll be supporting a talented local artist.

MARK FARRANT

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