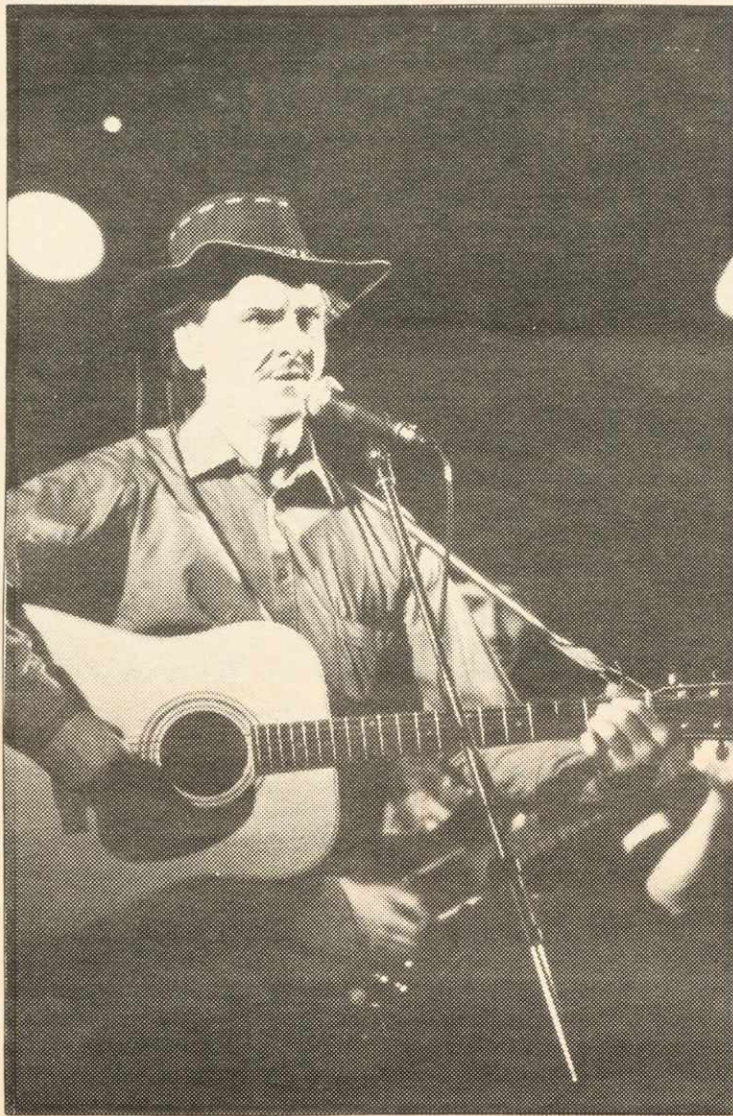


Open mike policy proves successful



Open Mike Night at the Pub Flamingo provides a stage for every type of music—even country and western.

by Aran McKittrick

EVERY MONDAY night at the Club Flamingo in the centre of Halifax local musicians come together to "jam" in front of the local crowd. Hosted by Mark Macmillan a remarkable talent in himself, the range and quality of music at the show is quite outstanding.

The show is given the name "Open Mike Night" and quite rightly so, the night I was there nine or ten bands were allowed to approach the microphone and produce their own renditions of songs by artists such as Muddy Waters, the Chili Peppers and Randy Travis. Most important of all however, there were a half dozen or so original songs produced by the likes of Jeremy Robinson and several of the other bands.

In between the hustle and bustle of sound checks and the actual acts themselves I was able to nab an interview with Mark MacMillan, "the man behind the show".

Gaz: How did the "Open Mike" night start at the Flamingo, and what is your role here?

Mark: It originally started as a Jazz/Blues night where bands from the local area would come out and play on an irregular basis.

I made the suggestion to Derek and Keith (the managers) to make it a regular event which I would man-

age. They agreed and everything came together from there. Basically what I do is to organize the show, making sure there are bands to play, what bands play, when they play, and so on.

Gaz: So what type of bands play here or have played here?

Mark: Oh, we get all types here. There are blues bands, jazz bands, country bands, rock and roll... Black Pool was one of the bands that started out here! We have even had people just come in and read poetry on stage before! There is quite a variety.

Gaz: The bands don't get paid for playing here but what other incentives are there for the bands who play?

Mark: No, the bands don't get paid but I think they enjoy performing for the audience so much that they don't mind giving up one night a week to come out and play. It also provides the band with the experience of playing live in front of a crowd which can build a band's confidence. It also provides the bands with exposure to the public which is important for an up and coming band.

Gaz: So how long have you been playing guitar?

Mark: Well, I have been playing for quite a few years now. I have done a fair share of touring with different bands. This show, however, has been going on for two and a half years.

Gaz: What about the crowd? Are there regulars?

Mark: Oh yeah, there's a regular crowd here. They're great because they're really open minded about the whole thing. It is not just older folks we get here either, we get all age groups. Lots of them come down to support their friends or family, even from as far away as Antigonish. We get some newcomers as well who just come down to find out what it's all about.

Gaz: Earlier you mentioned that there was a lot of talent in the Halifax area yet this show is one of a remaining few which promotes local bands. Why is that?

Mark: Well, I believe that there has been a dramatic change in the music scene in Halifax. There used to be numerous live bands all over town. Argyle Street used to be nothing but live bands...

I think it has come about from the change in taste of the crowds. All they want nowadays is loud dance music which any D.J. with a good P.A. system can provide. A lot of bars don't want to pay for a live band when it is possible to make a profit by just hiring a D.J. .

Gaz: If the "Live Band" scene is indeed dying out, do you think this show is going to continue?

Mark: Yeah, I think so. I believe it will continue for a while longer because there will always be musicians out there who love to perform a live show. There will always be a crowd out there who will want to listen as well.

Keep your heads down in dreamland

by Andrew Duke

Black Box
Dreamland
BMG

THE BIGGEST SELLING U.K. single of 1990 came from an Italian trio, Black Box. The song was "Ride on Time"; it consisted of bits of vocals from the Loleta Holloway track, "Love Sensation", strewn over a house rhythm paired with the bassline from S'Express' "Theme from S'Express". Despite the lack of original ideas and the fact that the main vocal sample is "because you're right on time" (not "ride on time"), the result is still brilliant. The full-length release from this band is the same way. Technology and an absence of creativity threaten to reduce the disc to the level of computer-driven robomusic, but, thankfully, some soul manages to rear its head. Almost all of the credit goes to former Weathergirl, Martha Wash, who provides incredible vocal work on six cuts. Without her input, these disc jockeys (including DJ Leleweil

of Starlight and "Numero Uno" fame) would undoubtedly have come up with six variations on one piano-line.

What we end up getting is two more perky singles - the bastardized 7" edit of "Everybody Everybody", and "I Don't Know Anybody Else" - an Earth Wind and Fire cover ("Fantasy", the fourth single in the U.K.), two Chimes-like offerings ("Open Your Eyes" and "Hold On"), and some other surprises. The first bit of inspiration is "Strike It Up", a hip-house chugger that makes little lyrical sense but sounds great. The other oddity is the inclusion of two short but beautiful instrumentals; in the slow jam style is "Ghost Box", a track that could be a perfect ballad if vocals were added, and the relaxing sound of rolling ocean waves forms the title track. *Dreamland* is certainly one strange and inconsistent mixed bag of music, but somehow it works.

Boxcar
Vertigo
Nettwerk

Nettwerk Productions, the pride of the West Coast, continue to

scour the globe for exciting, underexposed bands. Boxcar, a quartet from Brisbane, Australia, have kept many waiting for their domestic debut since "Freemason (You Broke The Promise)" hit No. 8 on the Billboard dance chart last summer. This track was deserving of its hit status, helped along, though it was, by its similarity to New Order's "Bizarre Love Triangle".

On Vertigo, Boxcar continue, in the words of guitarist/vocalist David Smith, to "write songs rather than just lay down grooves or beats." And like one aforementioned artist, Boxcar have a knack for writing quirky, dance-pop gems that get under your skin and stay there. The lyrics do not make a lot of sense, but the grooves are irresistible.

Some big names have helped out here. Arthur Baker remixed "Freemason" (after it became a major hit, incidentally), Australian DJ Robert Racic (known for smoothing the eccentricities of Severed Heads into house hits) produced the disc, and Francois Kevorkian (who mixed Depeche

Mode's *Violator*) remixed their newest single, "Gas Stop (Who Do You Think You Are?". You've probably heard this song, it's that wonderfully pensive number that deals with a dilemma we've all faced: when your date has gone into the gas station's restroom for a second, do you wait or take off without him/her?

Don't get me wrong. Depeche Mode, New Order, The Pet Shop Boys, and many others have been writing odd songs like this for ages, but Boxcar does it just as well, and sometimes better.

Moev
Head Down
Nettwerk

This is the third full-length release in six years from Vancouver's Moev, and the second featuring vocalist Dean Russell. *Head Down* highlights the efforts of Tom Ferris, the only remaining original member, and Kelly Cook (on keyboard/programming and bass/guitars/drum programming respectively), and has John Fryer producing. Known for his work with Love and Rockets and the Cocteau Twins, Fryer has certainly

brought out the best in this band. While their second release, *Yeah, Whatever*, managed to be both claustrophobic and schizophrenic in style, *Head Down* has been given room to breathe.

The joy in this release is the interplay of rock and dance elements. No, this is not like the British indie-dance of late, this is different. Moev melds rock guitar grind to a heavy dance beat to form one heck of a DJ's delight. Russell's vocals are fitting for the Moev sound; never lightweight, never too morose, just a dark human growl. He offers lines such as "It's only natural/to be sexual/to feel a certain longing", and song titles range from "Sadistic Years" and "Noise" to "Miracles". *Head Down* is a complete and pleasing effort.

"In & Out" and "Head Down", the two singles thus far, are further fleshed out by Nettwerk's resident-remixer, George Manaiatis, and given the extended remix treatment. Distributed by Capitol, Nettwerk Productions can be reached at 1717 West 4th Ave., Vancouver, B.C. V6J 1M2.