

arts

Robinson's Open Sky is the limit

by Leslie J. Furlong

Here's to you, Mr. Robinson.

Music from the Atlantic region is currently undergoing a period of increased recognition nationwide. Thankfully, there is nothing here that can be identified as a "scene" where individuality is expressed en masse. The musical styles and influences being drawn upon vary from artist to artist and individuality seems to be encouraged, which in itself is an accomplishment.

Jeremy Robinson Open Sky Local Music Scene

Still, it will take time to recognize whether this attention will be either positive and long-term or if it will ultimately amount to a curious blip on pop radar. With *Open Sky*, his second independent release and his follow up to *Miner*, Jeremy Robinson will no doubt keep public attention on Maritime music. Whether this attention is positive or not is a matter of debate.

I'll be honest and say this tape is my first exposure to Robinson as a musician, beyond seeing his name on posters in coffee shops and record stores. It's an attractive package to look at, very professional. As for what is inside, my opinion is mixed. I'm still not certain if I'm being too easy on him or too tough.

This collection of ten songs hits highs and lows. The problem is the consistency, or the lack of it, in the final product; some of these songs don't seem to have been finished before the final cut. Lyrics tend to be fatty and could stand a trimming, being in some cases trite, with painful rhyme schemes ("Face Up To You"), or just lacking in colour, ("I Most Certainly Would Say"). Sometimes his voice, which reminds me of John Hiatt's, betrays him by not doing what the song requires and the emotional content is lost.

The high point of the album is the musicianship, the skills of the various hired guns remaining at peak form throughout. In the two songs previously mentioned, the guitar playing becomes their one saving

grace. The background vocals of Sherri Morrison, especially on "Old Man Laughs", provide Robinson with the means of expression he sometimes lacks in his own voice, making it one of the strongest tracks on the release. The two best songs are the album's bookends, "Need My Help", possessing tight playing and the most energy of the ten, and the album's closer "Brilliant Mistake" (a notion I can certainly relate to), in which all the ingredients lyric, music and vocals, come together backed up by the tenor sax of Bucky Adams.

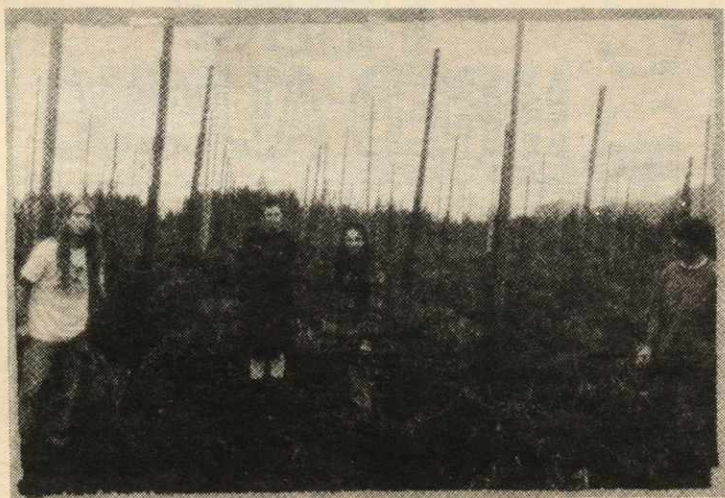
From what I have heard on this album, I would guess that live performance would be Jeremy Robinson's greatest strength and that he has found it difficult to capture that on tape, even with the production assistance of Terry Pulliam. There are a few really good songs to be found here and a couple that should be quickly forgotten, but mostly what I heard was filler, good, as far as it goes, but filler all the same. I don't hate it, but I won't keep it. Maybe I'll give it to my parents.



Jeremy smoked before class today.

Next week in arts: An interview with jale and a catalogue of the local music scene

Sweet grunge and altogether no substance



Hey! We can't see the trees for the forest!

by Lange Zipfel

You know what snotty Vancouver yuppies say about Chilliwack, B.C.—yoghurt has more culture. I have to agree to some extent—this is the part of the world that produced such marvels as Loverboy and the Headpins and apparently that brand-name literary buffoon Douglas Coupland visits the area when his local video store has rented out its collection of Gilligan's Island episodes.

Mystery Machine glazed Netzwerk

Glazed, the first real record by Chilliwack's Mystery Machine, does little to make this reviewer any more eager to get his ass out to said pueblo to check out Netzwerk's latest addition to its moderately talented roster. Mystery Machine have released an indie cassette called *Smegma*, which helped them win CTR's 1991 local band competition, first prize being studio time. Careful use of this studio time and production assistance from Dave Ogilvie (Sloan, Skinny Puppy, Babes in Toyland), led to second-stage performances at the '92 Lollapalooza fest, an opening slot for

Pearl Jam and a Netzwerk deal.

That's the good news, folks. The, uh, not so good news is that Mystery Machine are a whole lot more machine than mystery. *Glazed* is not so much an album as a transparent summary of everybody's favourite punk rock influences from the past fifteen years or so, with a long, slow nod in the direction of Seattle. Here are the spoken-word/grunge antics of Slint without the lyrical wit, the irritating post-'86 Sonic Youth knack for taking a decent song and burying it in unnecessary noise, vocals à la Thurston Moore without the sly cynicism and humour, and straightforward punk-grunge à la every band you seem to hear at the Deuce these days.

This is not a bad record, it's just that everything here has been done before, and done better, and the stuff that does stand out and grab you—the fluid acoustic intros and the peripheral atmospheric—ends up being compromised by an unimaginative rhythm section and lyrics that must've sounded great when they were written, at a very stoned 3 am acoustic guitar session in somebody's basement. Fragments of this record leap out at you. The distortion blasts on "Shaky Ground" and the acoustic workouts on "High Test" and "Hooked" grab the ear for moments,

but then it's back into the tar-pit of grunge riffing.

What most of the so-called "grunge" musicians don't understand is that walls of sound are made of bricks. The distortion gods of the early 80s (Husker Du, the Necros, Dinosaur) and the 70s (Sabbath, the Stooges, MC5) didn't just turn it all up to eleven: they were extraordinarily competent technically, and those throbbing gobs of distortion were not just simple powerchords played through masses of effects. Bob Mould, Scott Asheton and J. Mascis had in common the very un-punk rock like ability to play fast, complex and fluid guitar lines that caressed as well as body-punched the listener. Mystery Machine, like their richer brethren from Seattle (Pearl Jam, Mudhoney) turn it up oh so very loudly, play big heavy messy chords, and generally fail to convince me that there is anything much other than a kind of intense sincerity happening here. I think about this record, and it doesn't turn me off, or on—it doesn't really leave much of an impression. What the hell, I have Walt Mink's *Miss Happiness*, and *Nevermind* somewhere, and a respectable 80s punk collection, so not listening to this record shouldn't cause me any hardships.