

Stopping at every station

BY ELAINE BELTAOS AND GREG MCFARLANE

If nothing else, Craig Mercer is confident. Whether he is sitting down discussing his band, PF Station, or performing on stage, the impression he gives is one of an experienced, focussed musician.

It's easy to see how this persona has developed. Despite a mention in Maclean's magazine, the band has received sparse media coverage in Halifax, but still manages to play more shows than any other metro-area band. For the past year, the trio, consisting of Mercer (guitar, vocals), Mike MacDougall (bass) and Kirk Hatcher (drums), has been offering up its version of modern rock to crowds in just about every Halifax venue imaginable, save for the now-defunct Birdland.

"It was hard for us to get a gig [at Birdland]," says Mercer. "Our music wasn't conducive to a lot of the music played there. Now we have gigs at Merrill's, the Oasis, the Blues Corner, and so on. We switch [our musical style] up in accordance to where we are playing."

During a recent concert at JJ Rossy's, the band showed how they can take the stage at clubs with obviously different musical climates. They are chameleons, fusing rock, funk, pop, and the blues with elevator-esque melodies and echoing, spacey sequences — all of this in what the band introduced as a "straight rock" set. This diversity is found more so in PF Station's trademark instrumental jams than in the set structure of each song.

"There are a lot of mood and tempo changes. It is very improvisational, so you'll never hear a song sound the same way twice," says Mercer of his band's performances. "If it's a good night, people will walk out saying 'wow,' but sometimes it can sound average. That's what improvisation is all about —

you take your chances."

After a year of performing with the current line up (approximately twenty five musicians have been part of PF

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Station since its inception, with Mercer being the only original member left), the band is branching out. They are arranging gigs in campus pubs throughout the maritimes, and are in the process of recording their first album under their own label, Drop Records.

They have also secured an opening slot for Big Sugar's

September 3rd concert at Dalhousie. Rather than seeing PF Station as the "little band," Mercer treats this gig as an opportunity for growth.

"We're confident that our music is good; we're going to impress people if they come out. That's why we take those [opening] gigs, because it may be our lucky break."

And they deserve that lucky break. The fact that PF Station can jump from one style to another so easily within a song proves that they are skilled musicians. Although Mercer is the only guitarist in the band, PF Station does not sound like it is missing a second guitar. The solid rhythm section, along with Mercer's ability to maximize his sound by using familiar guitar effects in an unconventional way, produces a complete sound. Mercer's ability as a singer is also evident. His voice is sensitive to the music, always at the forefront, but never overbearing. To many people, this is the quality that can make or break a band, and it helps to make PF Station.

PF Station is playing on September 5th at The Blues Corner and on the 6th at King's College.



PF Station plays the Grawood in 1996.

Phish

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All this visual stimuli, however, never came close to eclipsing the reason why all us people flocked to Nowhere, Northern Maine for two days. Phish was *always* the main attraction, and the band's six blistering sets showcased some of the finest live music I have ever seen. There were no mosh pits, violence or anger in the crowd. The only vibe was the happy vibe, and that did not get as taxing on the nerves as I thought it most likely would.

Reviewing a Phish concert wouldn't be complete without a nod towards the Phish fan. I had never really cared much for the band, as the quality of their albums is far from any-

thing spectacular. But there are legions of fans who swear by the music and aim their VW Microbuses wherever the band play. And the band is good in a live setting. Bordering on phenomenal. However, those disillusioned folk out there who feel that following Phish is their calling (the only way to live a proper life), are missing something. The music is a stolen moment in time to be savoured, not followed, hunted down, or demanded. Phish should be admired for their combined musical genius and their business savvy (about six million from ticket sales for the weekend), but to give them your future like they are spiritual gurus is an out-dated and naive 'sixties philosophy.

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EDMONTON	---	16:00 20:10 ²	---	---	10:30	---	---
CALGARY	18:35	---	19:45	14:00 ¹ 18:35 ²	---	---	---
TORONTO	10:35	14:10 23:15 ²	13:55 ³ 14:40	15:40 ² 20:40 ¹ 23:15 ²	12:00 23:25	10:10	18:30
ST. JOHN'S	---	18:20 ² 19:50 ¹	---	18:20 ² 18:35 ¹	---	---	---

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