

# ENTERTAINMENT

## Rough Trade and Pope are good, but . . .

by Gisèle Marie Baxter

Review: Rough Trade, *Avoid Freud* (True North TN-43)

Make no mistake — Carole Pope, voted most promising female vocalist at this year's Junos, is a provocative and talented singer. She and her band, Rough Trade, have come a long way to the success they're enjoying with their debut album for True North, *Avoid Freud*, which has achieved gold-record status.

*Avoid Freud* is an amazing record; Carole Pope and Kevan Staples have composed ten energetic songs which pull no punches, lyrically or musically. The arrangements are powerful, classic pop showcases for Pope's deep, forceful, seductive vocals, and while the image may be frightfully trendy, the music, with its frequently gripping interplay between keyboards and percussion, owes a debt to rock 'n' roll at its finest.

It is the lyrics, and the general effect of all this, which bothers me. If this is the definitive expression of Carole Pope, then Rough Trade is soon going to amount to decadent chic, nothing more. There is a great perception at work here, and a brash yet effective sense of humor, but it tends to stay on the surface. Pope's lyrics tell — in no uncertain terms, mind you — of manipulation in relationships. It's a jungle out there: men and women engaged in vicious power struggles under the guise of romance. Pope

describes all this in lurid, though articulate, detail. Would that she took the next step with the scenario and let us know *her* reaction.

Like Carole Pope, Elvis Costello treats, with wit and sharp perception, fascism both in relationships and in politics. Yet I always sense that he feels a link between power struggles on a personal and governmental level; besides, he often displays a vulnerability which makes his stance convincing. Chrissie Hynde frequently sings in tough-lady style, yet her moments of introspection give depth to her presentation. I believe Carole Pope could be as convincing and as potentially great if she would reveal a few cracks in the relentless facade.

Besides, the tough pose is sometimes exaggerated to the extent that Pope's powerful vocals seem to be bludgeoning the music. Nevertheless, there is some fine material here, such as the witty current single, "Fashion Victim", "High School Confidential" — a very sultry number about a blonde temptress ("teenage Brandos stalk her in the halls/they tease her with cat-calls") — "It's a Jungle", with its vibrant percussion, tight guitar lines and excellent vocal, and "Emotional Blackmail", which is very convincing and has a great tune.

This band should not just strive to be The Outrageous Carole Pope and Rough Trade. They have too much talent for that.

Carole Pope's magnetism



on vinyl should translate into an electrifying stage personality. Despite my quibbles with "Avoid Freud", I suggest you check out this band at the

Super Sub on April 4, when they will be playing the McInnes Room. Incidentally, The Parts, a Quebec-based new wave outfit which also sounds

rather outrageous and quite fun, judging by their most interesting press kit, will also be at the Super Sub, playing the Garden.

## Ellis Brothers are good early rockers

by Gisèle Marie Baxter

Do you remember — or have you come to know and love — the Coasters? Songs by Lieber and Stroller? That whole marvellously humorous period of rock'n'roll in the mid to late '50s?

Then let me introduce you to the Ellis Brothers Band, which will be playing at the Super Sub on April 4. The band consists of Dick Snook (saxophone), Richie Richmond (bass), JP Ellis (piano, lead vocals) and Patrick Ellis

(drums, backing vocals). I had an opportunity to chat with the brothers last week.

This group specializes in boogie, rhythm'n'blues and rock'n'roll which recalls its great early days, with a touch of jazz and ragtime. As musicians, they have played with some of Halifax's finest: Richie Richmond was with Peppertree, and Dick Snook

with the Lincolns; the band has also worked with Bill Stevenson and Kevin Head,

both of whom they admire greatly.

The Ellis Brothers Band came together last November and, as JP told me, "old rock'n'roll is in some ways the mainstay" of their approach. Their music is "piano oriented rock... (with) a loose party feeling." They like humorous character songs which tell a story while musically inciting you to dance, and this is reflected in their choice of material for live shows. Jerry Lee Lewis and the Coasters are

represented in the sets; among modern artists, Moon Martin, Rockpile, and Ian Dury display the kind of wit and energy they like to cover. Their own slyly funny, tightly arranged material is gaining popularity, and deservedly. RCA Records has been impressed; things are looking pretty good for a deal with that label.

Several years in the music business have taught the Ellis brothers a great deal, and they have a very perceptive view of

the industry and the Canadian music scene. The Maritimes, they feel, are geographically isolated, which is a hindrance to bands here, but there are compensations. Audiences are very loyal to local acts, demanding and getting great live shows. This area is not trendy, but is a good place to develop musical ideas. The brothers are not adverse to relocating, but feel that it's better to build up a following at home first; after all, the competition is fiercer in a musical centre like Toronto, and the initial interest will not be there — it has to be built up at home first.

Percussionist Sleepy Thomas will be joining the band for the Super Sub on April 4; the Ellis Brothers Band will be performing in the Green Room. Patrons of Scoundrels know they put on a great show, and here, you'll be able to dance. They'll have you dancing with a smile on your face.

