

## ARTS

# ANOTHER STONE IN THE WALL

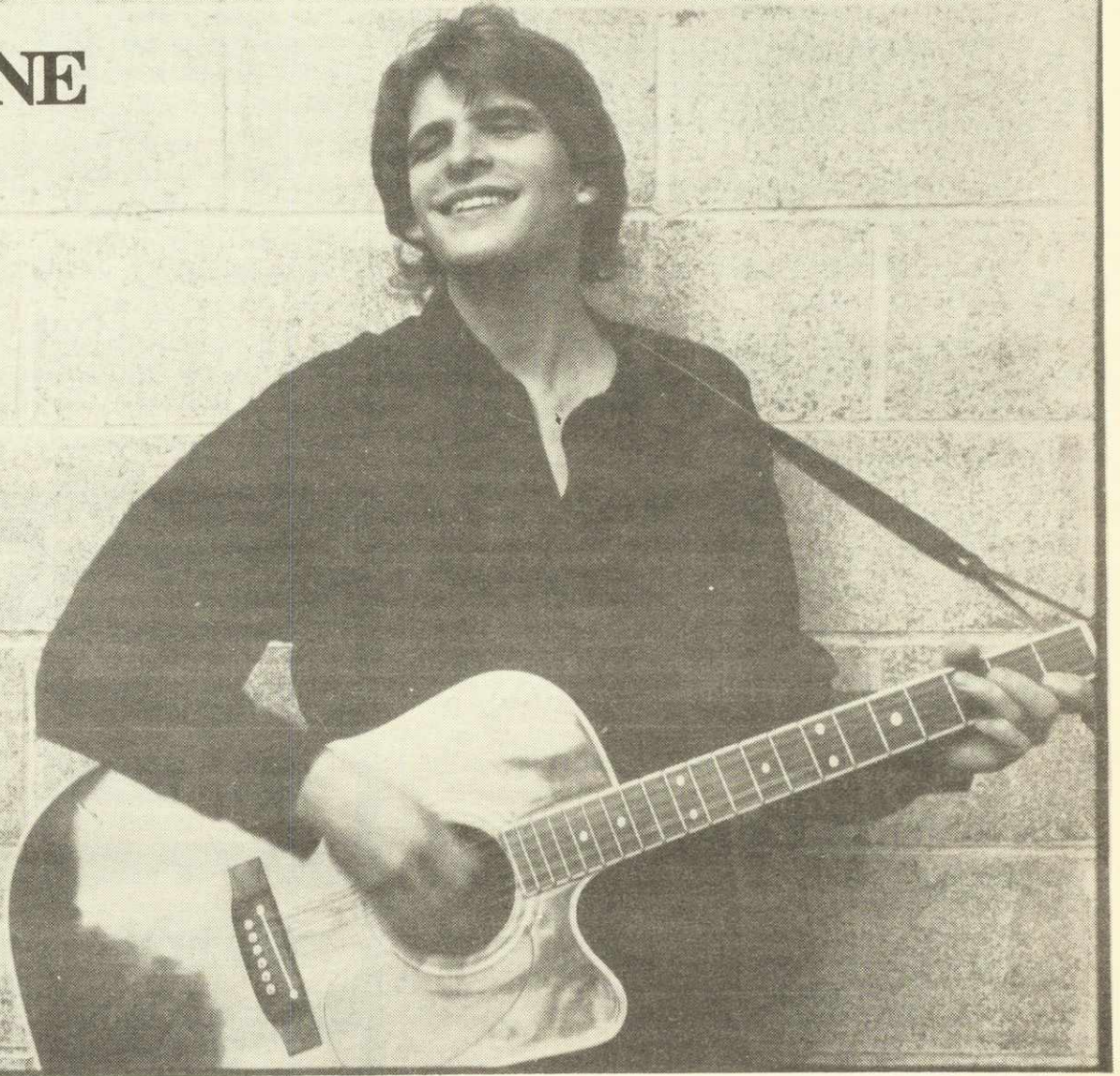


PHOTO: JIM GRENNON

*I'll be a miner till the day I die  
I hope I find what I'm looking for, on  
the other side...*

(Title track from *Miner* E.P. —  
Jeremy Robinson & Stone Roots)

BY ALEX BURTON

Times are tough, and the music business is no exception. Perhaps that is why it is so refreshing to find someone who wants to follow the road less travelled.

## MUSIC

*Jeremy Robinson & Stone Roots*  
Independent

Singer-songwriter Jeremy Robinson came to Halifax from Toronto to take a run at the life of a professional musician. And it's not easy.

Determined to stand out from the packaged techno-based music that seems so prevalent today, Robinson and his band Stone Roots produce an original sound that is as refreshing as it is familiar. His music is not easily definable, though he places it in a broad category which might include the Waterboys, Indigo Girls, Cowboy Junkies, and The Tragically Hip.

Robinson's approach to his music and the music business itself is also refreshing. Combining dedication, spontaneity, realism, modesty and a touch of philosophy, Robinson's vision of his place in the band and in the business is novel.

"A songwriter just sets up a process in which other people can express

themselves," he says. "Each musician is creating within the context of a song."

It's this kind of attitude that has allowed Robinson to play with some of Halifax's most respected and durable musicians. In particular, Mark Macmillan (guitar) has had a strong influence on both the sound of the band and Robinson himself.

Robinson's approach to every aspect of the band reveals a child-like enthusiasm checked by a wisdom far beyond his years. "I've been independent up to now, I don't have management or anything. I don't need someone to do things for me that I can do," he says. "I like to get my hands on everything because you always learn something, like how to make a poster or produce a tape."

Yet Robinson's enthusiasm isn't blind. "It's important to limit your expectations to the next step," he says. He's very aware of the challenges of the music business and keeps his success in perspective.

He does this in part by defining success as making a living from music and enjoying what you are doing. He knows he's accomplished the latter and seems to be on his way to achieving the former.

Robinson's interest in songwriting, which he describes as a craft, is evident in his first recording. "There is an irony in taking the personal, building a bridge, and making it ultimately universal," he says of songwriting.

He tries to avoid political material, but acknowledges he gets sucked

in sometimes. "I just think politics is what divides people, and music should be uniting them."

Robinson admits *Miner* lacks a pop tune that would fit nicely into radio playlists, but he seems more concerned with the integrity of his music than its hit value. Citing Robbie Robertson's latest project as an example, Robinson says, "something that is good usually takes a few listens. I don't think a pop song is synonymous with bad... but I don't believe a lot of [pop songs] are going to endure."

It's the "classic" songs that interest Robinson, and he says it's classic rock that has influenced him the most. "I'm interested in what makes a song classic. What makes a song last twenty years?"

Robinson thinks soul is the key ingredient. He says it's not soul in a traditional sense, but soul as an intangible element found in all music. "What moves me is something with soul, and that can be anything from folk music to someone's voice."

The name of the band reflects Robinson's desire to find the magic of "classic rock," without stifling new ideas and sounds. He says the name comes from a song he wrote several years ago. The word "Stone" is symbolic of rock, while "Roots" suggests an awareness of the past and its "classic" music.

Robinson's strong self-identity and his instinctive awareness of what it takes to become successful in the music business is an unusual combi-

nation, but one that may give him an edge over many other aspiring musicians in a competitive industry. The positive reaction to the release of *Miner*, and a growing local following

would seem to attest to this. It looks as if Robinson's decision to work in Halifax and look for success "on the other side" was the recipe for a business that can be very unforgiving.

## Chip off the block

If you are one of those music fans that like to be one step ahead of the trend, then Jeremy Robinson's recording debut, *Miner*, is a must for your collection.

In it, Jeremy Robinson & Stone Roots have managed to create a sound that is simultaneously new and classic.

Like many good bands these guys have taken elements of the tried and true and injected it with their own vigour and energy. The end result is a whole new sound that is somehow familiar.

The mixture of folk elements, punchy electric sounds and infectious melodies creates a sound that is easy to listen to, but is definitely not easy listening.

Their press release places Robinson & Stone Roots in a broad category with everything from the Indigo Girls and the Cowboy Junkies to the Band and the Grateful Dead, but comparing their sound to anyone else seems limiting.

The cassette is an excellent showcase for Robinson's songwriting talents. His lyrical imagery is rich and

full, and easily fools the listener into believing this rookie is an experienced craftsman. In particular, the title song "Miner" and the second track, "Blind Thief," paint wonderful audio pictures.

The cassette was recorded in a single live session with minimal production. Consequently, the songs are not as polished as they might be, but this is a strength of the recording, not a weakness. It gives the cassette an intimacy that might have been missed in a studio recording.

The recording also highlights the strong musicianship of the band. Mark Macmillan's electric guitar is an excellent foil to Robinson's acoustic sound and Ian O'Donnel (drums) and Brian Bourne (chapelman stick) round out a sound that is as strong as it is subtle.

Robinson says he plans to cut a full-length recording sometime this year. Meanwhile, the band continues to perform at local watering holes including Jan. 30 at Caravan and Feb. 13 and 27 at the Flamingo. You can pick up a copy of the cassette at Sam's, Taz, or Dischord.