

# Northern Pikes fly high with the Big Blue Sky

Interview by Dragos Ruiu

You could call the Northern Pikes the little band that could. They've come a long way from when they formed in 1984. They used to tour all around in an old school bus that wouldn't go faster than 50 mph; it had folding bunks for sleeping six. "We've gone through so many blizzards (in that bus)," says guitarist Brian Potvin. "We'd make an eight hour drive from Saskatoon to Calgary for a one nighter just to make the payments on equipment for a month."

But the band's hard work has paid off. Through extensive touring, an EP and an 8-track mini-album that they funded themselves, they gained an extensive regional following and praise and notice from the record industry.

The first two albums cost the band \$26,000. "We still have payments we're paying off for those two records..." says Brian. But the records gained the four man combo recognition, vital college radio air-play, and eventually a major-label deal with Virgin records in January 1987. A widely covered event in the music press and on MuchMusic, the signing was regarded as a gamble for Virgin.

The subsequent album *Big Blue Sky* and video releases have put the gamble ideas to rest. The band's popularity is steadily gaining. They are currently on an extensive Canadian tour. "It's going really well, surprisingly well," says Brian. "It's surprising, we're playing cities

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like Brandon, and Kenora where you expect them to have never heard of us, but they have. Winnipeg went really well."

The videos, which are currently on heavy rotation on MuchMusic undoubtedly

helped. "Videos are really like a commercial for the rest of your music. I guess you could look at them in two ways. You could be positive and consider them just another art form, but for some people they are negative because they get in the way of your visual imagination."

"I like our latest video ("Things I Do For Money") much more than the first one. In the first one ("Teenland") we were too tidy looking. This latest one really reflects the band better."

Being signed has also given the band more breathing room. "You're forever fighting the clock as an independent," says Brian about

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recording with expensive studio time. "You put down a part as good as you can and then you move on. This time there was a lot of 'Well, let's try this. Let's try that.' We could be much more particular about details and make sure everything was right."

Some of the tracks on their album are re-recordings of early Pikes songs from their indie releases. The pop influenced first single "Teenland" is such a song, they re-recorded it and tried to bring more energy to their music. As for the band's future, they are eager to get a second album out.

"We're not going to pull a Glass Tiger and release every song from our first album as a single. We aren't going to milk it to death that way. We're a career band, and we already have some good ideas about our next album. It won't resemble the first one; we want to keep our options open. Besides, it's really better when you have more than one album, because you can go out and put on a better show. You can play more songs



Four boys from Saskatchewan

the audience will identify with."

When their Canadian tour wraps up in Vancouver, the Pikes will be packing their bags for the States. "We're going to take part in a tour called Four Play. It involves four bands, and we are going to be touring together and playing rotating forty minute sets. It's going to be quite exciting; we're sponsored by a major brewery, and we're going to most of the major cities... We start off in Connecticut and are wrapping it up in Hollywood on November 18th."

The Four Play tour stars four bands from different recording labels, the Northern Pikes (Virgin), Hurrah (Arista), Royal Court of China (A&M), and Will & the Kill (MCA, Starring Will Sexton, Charlie's brother). This new idea is quite a departure from normal touring, which has seen a lack of record company support in the States lately. The bands will be sharing equipment and using one road crew and truck to keep overhead

down. The tour shirts will say "I discovered FOUR PLAY"

The band has already secured distribution for their next album in various parts of the world. "It's going to be in Scandinavia and Italy. And our first album is getting some air-play in the States now." Not bad for an innovative prairie band that was playing at a Regina high school grad party just two years ago.

With all this sudden exposure, have the Northern Pikes' lives changed? According to Brian, they're still just normal guys. "I went shopping today, no-one jumped on me. I'm going over to my friend's house tonight, and we're going to drink beer. My mom is cooking dinner right now and I'm going to have perogies. No, life here in Saskatoon is pretty normal."

The personable and amiable band will be playing at Dinwoodie Lounge Saturday October 3rd.

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