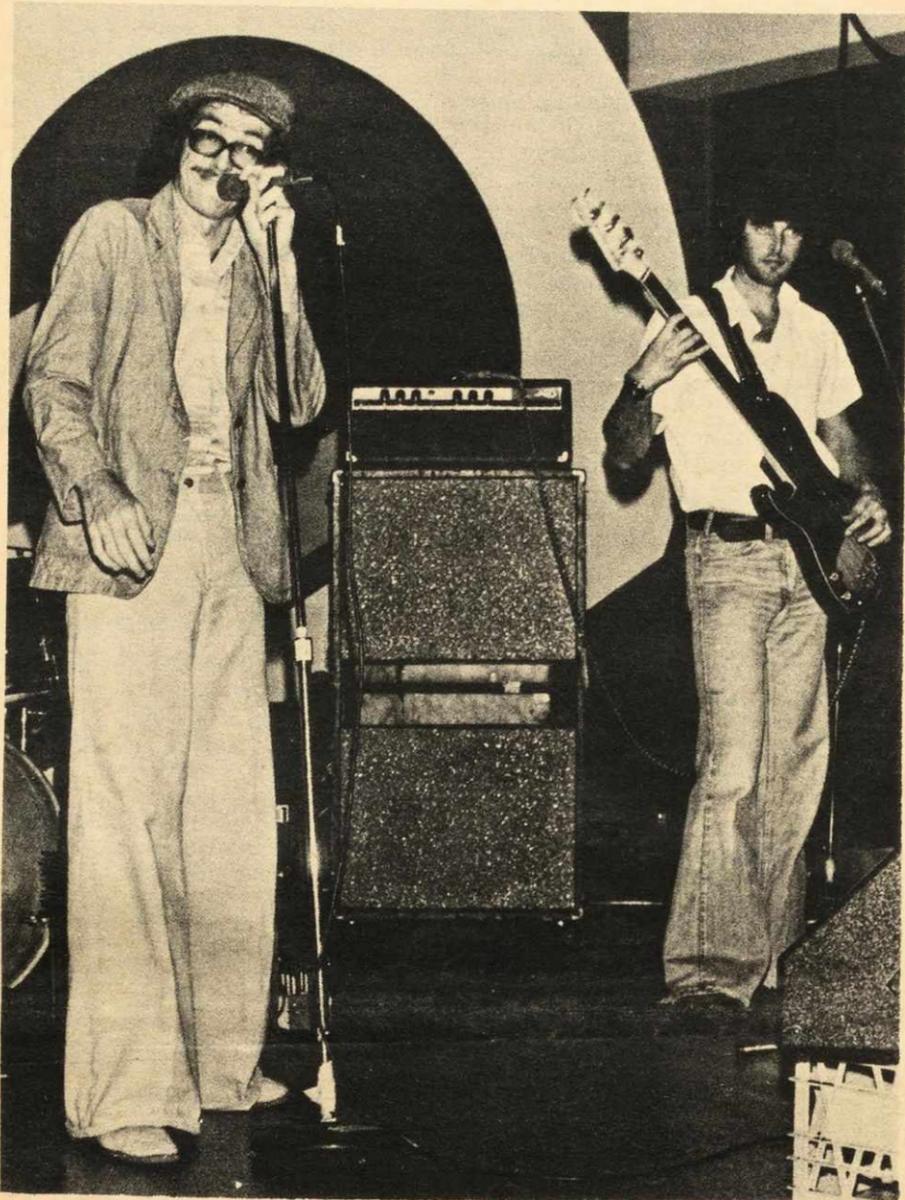


Dal Gazette Interview

Buddy and the Boys: Cape Breton Experience



Dal Photo/Morris

Buddy and the Boys, stars of countless "Dirty O's" and of the "Crossing the Causeway" play, are one of the best good time dance bands in Canada today. They will be returning to the Dalhousie campus on Monday, September 25 to play a benefit dance for Oxfam-Canada in the McInnes Room of the Student Union Building.

Dalhousie Gazette: We'll start from the beginning—can you tell us how the Boys got started.

MacDonald: The Boys got started, officially as Buddy and the Boys, in October 1977. We'd had an association for a number of years, four of us—Ralph, Berkley, Leon and I and we used to play off and on in a group called Home Brew. We'd get together periodically but we weren't together for probably 6 or 8 months. Three of us were in Halifax and Leon was out on his farm.

We decided at one point, through some urgings from some musical friends of ours, that we do something with the music that we already had written. Sam Moon, I don't mind saying, was an influence on that. So we decided to record some of it even before we had the band together and then we thought, jeez, if we got this record we might as well make a stab at going out and performing some of it. So . . . sometime in October last year, we decided to go in debt and purchase some equipment and see if we could perform this music.

Dalhousie Gazette: Can you talk about what led to the tunes that are on your record—I'm thinking of "Sysco Kid", "Hangin' Around", "Woolco". . . . They seem to be

saying something different than the regular top 40 tunes.

MacDonald: A lot of them speak of where we're coming from . . . "Sysco Kid" has a lot of references to the city of Sydney, and a lot of the filth and pollution that 35,000 people live under . . . in Ontario they'll close you down if you have a rate of 30 tons of fall-out per square mile and in Whitney Pier it's been measured upwards of about 180 tons per square mile, right over an elementary school. It's probably one of the higher rates of pollution in North America, possibly the world. And that's from our one industry, our steel plant.

Dalhousie Gazette: The "Sysco Kid" seems to comment on a feeling of how difficult it is to organize people here—maybe they're apathetic or they're afraid of losing their jobs. "Sysco Kid" comments on the reaction you get if you try to do something about the problem.

MacDonald: Yes, there's the famous statement made, or infamous statement made, by the former leader of the Steel plant, which was then called DOSCO . . . regarding pollution, he said, "No smoke, no baloney". Now, he didn't even say no steak, he wasn't promising that

Buddy and the Boys recorded their highly acclaimed first album "Buddy" in October 1977. Since then they have been playing to sellout crowds throughout the Maritimes both on their own and with "Crossing the Causeway"—a musical revue about the ups and downs of Cape Bretoners. The band is a strong force in the musical and theatrical activity taking place on the island now. All the band members—Max MacDonald, Ralph Dillon, Leon Dubinsky, Berkley Lamey—are from Cape Breton, except for newcomer, drummer Ron Parks, from Halifax and Ontario.

The Boys have a faithful and growing following and can always be counted on to provide good music, a good time and the type of humour that makes audiences feel like they're laughing at an inside joke.

This interview was conducted with lead vocalist Max MacDonald in the heart of industrial Cape Breton by Julie Zatzman for the Dalhousie Gazette.

The Boys are performing here Monday, September 25, 9 to 1 in the McInnes Room of the Dal SUB, in a benefit for Oxfam-Canada. Buddy and the Boys are generously donating their time to Oxfam for the benefit so . . .

If "you're hangin' around with nothin' to do", then we encourage you to see one of Canada's best bands, support a good cause and have a great time next Monday night with the Boys.

much—but he figured we could get baloney out of it if we kept living underneath that smoke. The plant is still the mainstay of the community, even though it loses incredible amounts of money.

Dalhousie Gazette: So, do you feel the song has a cynical outlook, or do you see that anything can be done about the pollution?

MacDonald: Well, I can really only speak about performing it, because Leon Dubinsky wrote the song, and what went on in his head while he was writing the song, I can't comment on. . . . With that in mind, I see the song as having a lot of negatives to it, but at the same time it's a thing that's been accepted here for so long, and still is, for understandable reasons. But it is important to say it out front, you know, that the whole town is covered with shit—because it is—orange shit—all over this city. . . . You see it in the winter very well, because against a backdrop of white snow, it's quite apparent what the fall-out is.

Dalhousie Gazette: Given that unemployment insurance is the biggest employer here and there are DREE grants and all these other handouts, obviously by your music you people

are saying this isn't enough and we are accepting your handouts, but begrudgingly. Generally what seems to be the essence of the problem in Cape Breton?

Dalhousie Gazette: How about "Hangin' Around"—that's sort of a humorous but cynical look at the whole state of Poge in Cape Breton, which is almost an institution.

MacDonald: That's the largest employer in Cape Breton. The unemployment rate is upwards of 30 to 40 percent.

In one sense "Hangin' Around" points out the potential strength of people that could have some bearing on changing the situation. It says are you going to just sort of hang out and do nothing, which you have the opportunity to do? Or are you going to sort of look around and see the causes of that situation, and change it? I think the song in some ways is a challenge to those people who are on unemployment. But it's presented in a humorous way, I mean you can't beat people over the head with this stuff.

Dalhousie Gazette: What about "Working at the Woolco". I don't think it was written by the Boys, it was written by Dave Harley?

MacDonald: It was partially written by the Boys. It was brought to us by Dave Harley and Bob Loblaw. He looks around and writes a lot of verses, comedy routines . . . he's been known to comment on a lot of things, but that's one thing he brought to us. I think it was in a letter he sent us one time when he was away, and we looked at it . . . at the time we were writing a sort of story about this fictional character called Buddy, and we were examining different situations that we could put Buddy in and at one point we had him leave the Maritimes. He'd gone through some situations outside and wanted to bring it back, but we weren't sure what we were going to do with him once we brought him back. We put him on unemployment, but we didn't want to hang him on unemployment, so we thought, jeez, to get him a job, and at the same time we get this letter from David Harley talking about someone working as manager-trainee at Woolco, and that was a fitting job to give Buddy. Then we added some lyrics to it and wrote the music for it, and it seems to affect a lot of people in different ways. We've met a lot of people through playing engagements who at one time or another have gone through the ranks of Woolco—K-Mart or Metropolitan—and even the people who are still working there get a lot of energy from it. It's incredible—it was sort of written as a comment, but certainly it wasn't a very serious one. But for some reason, that one song has affected an incredible number of people. The reaction to "Woolco" says to me a couple of things. One, is just that people will stay, or try to stay, in the Maritimes at any price and will even take jobs that have little satisfaction because even the little money that it gives them will allow them to stay.

MacDonald: There are a lot of problems, but the major one is that Cape Breton, and the Maritimes as a whole—with the exception of Halifax—is being turned into a huge reservation. I can understand better now what is happening and what has happened to our native people because they are being, and have been, bought off, and so are we. And being bought off at very low costs. We are being forced into that export market, it is a messy situation.

Maritimers are a strong pig-headed people and a lot of them, even with the situation as it is, still want to stay here—cause they are at the end of their rainbow. A lot of people will chase all over the world all of their

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