

Birdland Homeless

BY MARK REYNOLDS

Local music fans returning to Halifax may be disappointed to find that the Birdland Cabaret, one of the most prominent live entertainment venues in Halifax, has closed.

The bar, which had been located in the Trade Mart building on Brunswick Street, was forced to close its doors when noise levels interfered with the operations of a 24 hour call centre located in the same building. The owners managed to keep the club operating on a month to month basis, but had to shut down this spring.

The Birdland's operator, Greg Clark, said at that time that the owners would be opening at a new location over the summer, but this still has not happened. The Birdland's previous attempts to relocate to the old Studio space on Barrington street were cancelled due to the objections of the residents in the area, who felt that the noise and rowdiness of the bar's patrons would interfere with the enjoyment of their property.

As a compromise, Clark and his partner agreed to manage Moe's Bar and Grill, also

located in the old Studio Space.

"We had a bunch of staff that needed employment... and the idea of an alternative dance bar appealed to us," said Clark. "It was never intended to be a replacement for the Birdland."

Moe's Bar is attached to Granville Hall, which was *continued on page 19...*



Phishing Stories

BY JOHN CULLEN

You can't beat Phish on the side of the boat and leave them for dead, alright? — a Phish fan.

Mental image #1: close your eyes and picture a very large airport runway, two by eight kilometres in dimension. Got it? Now fill that space with 80,000 lucidly rabid fans and their tents. Add about 40,000 cars (well, mostly VW vans) and you have The Great Went — Phish's two day homage to Rock Festivals. But the picture you now have in your mind was only the *camping* area for the weekend bonanza — the concert area was a whole different bag of mushrooms.

I'm standing on a bale of hay. Some people beside my perch are using their bale as fuel for a large bonfire. The security guards smile in appreciation. The band is playing for, no scratch that, *entertaining* the crowd, when a white glider (yes, airplane) drops from the sky and starts performing gravity defying loops and twists. The plane makes a wide circle around the concert area and disappears from view. Bizarre things like this are happening all over the place.

I decide to wander around between sets and get a feel for the atmosphere of the newly decorated Loring Air Force Base. I see a field of corn off in the distance. It looks like the perfect place to lose myself for a while. When I arrive, it becomes apparent that this field is actually a maze littered with swing sets and lookout posts. How interesting. Furthermore, after a good half hour of walking around in circles, I realize that the planners for the festival put a lot of thought into something as trivial as a maze of corn. First, there are no dead ends to freak out the drug users. Second, the corn is only knee high so that: a) people can still see the band in the distance, and b) drug users won't freak out. How reassuring.

There is a large tent to the right of the maze with a warren of merchants and their surrounding wares. This is the

dark underbelly of Phish concerts. Inside the tent, I am bombarded by chic activist groups. They are here to peddle propaganda and catch a Phish show or two. Even rock festivals have their politics. Disgusted, I glance at a lonely table on my way out. Two affable teens are sitting above a large banner which reads "The Phellowship". I pick up their flyer and return to the outdoors.


On the way back to my bale of hay, I walk by the aforementioned warren. To the left people try to sell sandals made of old tires and recycled paper (how industrious) while to the right, Phish organizers have created a cornucopia of activities for "between set boredom". I could finger paint, participate in a game show hosted by Beat poets, or stand in a room that pumps out sudsy bubbles, but I am too hung over from my early morning raid on our cache of warm American Budweiser. I return to my group's meeting place and wait for the next show. I pull the Phellowship's newsletter out from my jeans and take a gander. The group is made up of recovering addicts who still like to follow their favourite band, Phish. It is a support group, more or less, whose job is to help addicts say no to drugs. And there are drugs to say 'no' to at Phish concerts. Lots of them. People walk around with balloons filled with nitrous oxide in one hand, and bags of

mushrooms in the other. It is a blatant slap in the face to American law, but the cops (few as they were) did not seem to care. Unfortunately, the table for the Phellowship is deserted, and the dealers all wear Rolexes. Drug culture is rock culture.

Mental Image #2: You are looking at the stage. About 200 yards to the right, there is a strange structure made solely out of oddly painted two-by-fours. It is at least sixty feet high, and it is accompanied by a large catapult on its left side. The top of the catapult explodes into a ball of flame and then starts dipping towards the structure. The mass of wood, resembling a five-year-old's rendition of the Eiffel Tower, is set ablaze and burns to the ground. The band does not miss a beat.

The Great Went was a perfectly executed idea. Planners and organizers turned a potential weekend of chaos into an efficient festival that had so much more to offer than anything Lollapalooza could even think of accomplishing. But at \$70 (US) a ticket, it was their duty to bring the festival-goer something they had never seen before. Granted, one could sit in their car or van all weekend and enjoy the festival through the foggy filter of a hot-box, but those more adventurous were aptly rewarded.

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