

hip, hard-hittin', & Haligonian



Hardhitters
Madhat
No Records

If you're a fan of Lunenburg quartet Madhat, you'll know that this band is long overdue for a recording (1993's *Freak* was the band's last effort). While the band's new disc, *Hardhitters*, isn't out until March 30, Madhat fans will soon hear that it was worth the wait.

Perhaps part of the reason *Hardhitters* is such a good disc is that the band played the songs live for quite awhile before hitting the 24-track. Although *Freak* was a lot of fun to listen to, in places you kind of got the impression that the

songs were taking over the band. The new disc, however, displays a band that is very tight, and thus in constant control of the music.

"The Ride" is the first single off *Hardhitters*, and is perhaps the best song that the band has written to date. Although the recorded version loses some of the energy of the live performance, it allows the listener to hear the really great lead guitar parts that aren't always easy to make out at the shows. Quite honestly, "The Ride" could very well be one of the best singles to come out of the local music scene in awhile.

An integral part of *Hardhitters*' groove is Jordi Comstock's drumming. While very technically proficient, Comstock's earlier drum parts relied on too many jazzy fills and playing around the beat, and thus the songs sometimes tended to lose direction. His approach is much more straightforward on the new disc, although he still manages to play accomplished parts. This balance really adds to the new songs.

Despite cheesy song titles (like "Got Me Some" and "Cool Guy"), *Hardhitters* is a great new cd. It should also be mentioned that despite its bad title, "Cool Guy" features guitarist Phil Zwicker doing a great job on lead vocals. So pick up *Hardhitters* — in it you'll find a collection of focused songs by a band that has come into its own.

AARON DHIR

To find out about Madhat, contact Wayne Mason at No Records — 423 1755.

South Shore skaters talk tunes

BY TIM COVERT

MINUTES before they were to leave in the face of a blizzard for Toronto, Lunenburg quartet Madhat stopped by the *Gazette*. Their new CD, *Hardhitters*, is due for release March 30 and is getting rave reviews. Phil Zwicker (guitar and vocals), Kirk Comstock (vocals and guitar), Hugh Morse (bass), and Jordi Comstock (drums and vocals) settled tiredly into the *Gazette*'s big orange sofa with relief.

Gaz: How does a rock band get started in Lunenburg?

Hughie: Coincidence. We're friends — we used to skate together.

Gaz: So you just happened to meet skating somewhere and then just formed a band?

Phil: It was just like one of those things where we were out skating and I heard that he played drums.

Jordi: So we'd say let's just go jam in his basement. We'd skate up to his house 'cause it was just up the hill, and I'd bring my drums and we'd play and stuff. Then we'd skateboard around town and then come back and play some more.

Hughie: Phil used to bug me to buy a bass for Christmas and I got a bass and then we thought about drummers. We went to Jordi's house and Kirk was just about to leave and we sat down and sang that special song — "Sweet Child of Mine" (laughter).

Madhat grew up with Joel Plaskett and the guys from Thrush Hermit and played Strawberry Jam, which was their very first real show. Their first

tape, recorded by their friend Terry, was self-titled, and after that came the self-recorded Crave. Then Wayne Mason, of then-fledgling No Records, approached Madhat to be on No's No Class Compilation.

Jordi: *Freak* [our third tape] was a little bit of an experiment for them [No Records] 'cause we were really one of their first releases. We started getting on the indie charts at Sam's and on CKDU.

Gaz: What's a big gig for you guys, one that makes you realize how successful the band is?

Hughie: We had some really big shows in Lunenburg that we put on ourselves. We'd rent a system and attract 400 people. Everybody

ers "Halifax's Madhat."

Phil: People were always like, 'I've had great experiences with Halifax bands,' and 'Oh, you're from near Halifax.'

Gaz: Are you guys gonna move into town?

Hughie: I live in the city and go to Dal, but everybody's pretty much doing their own thing right now.

Jordi: I'd miss my mom too much.

Hughie: Yeah, we're all momma's boys. I'm in university, Phil's working for the government; we're all pretty much taking care of our own business kind of thing.

Gaz: *Hardhitters* sounds a lot smoother than I expected. Is that what you wanted?

Kirk: That smoothness is

was groovin' and really into the music and just freakin' out.

Gaz: How did it feel when people started coming to gigs knowing your songs?

Kirk: Whenever someone comes up and compliments you on your music, it's totally unexpected.

Phil: It's one thing for somebody to say, 'You guys were good tonight.' A lot of people do that just to be nice.

Kirk: But if they actually write you letters...lots of people wrote us letters.

Gaz: When did you first tour outside the province?

Phil: Our first gig out of Nova Scotia was in Ottawa in the summer of '94. Ottawa was our first show after oodles of driving and we were opening for the Ripcordz. We did seven shows that tour, including one in New Brunswick.

Kirk: We had to go during the summer because we were in high school then, too. We went out when we could. So we had to wait a while after *Freak* was released — almost a year before we went out to Ontario. The number of bands when you go out there that are as popular as you are here...at the time we were more of a force around here. When we went to Ontario, there were just so many bands.

Jordi: The one thing when we did the tour was that no one really knew who we were, and the best thing was that people who didn't know us reacted well to the music.

Phil: When you get out there, it's sort of an advantage being from the east coast. We said we were from Halifax.

Kirk: If you're from anywhere around here they put on the post-

Laurence Currie.

Jordi: He just threw up the mikes and we just played, like we always do. We've been playing for so many years, we've gotten really tight that way.

Phil: He's a good engineer and a good player, too.

Gaz: You guys are going up to Toronto to do a video for "The Ride." Have you ever done any type of video before?

Phil: We tried doing one, but it didn't turn out.

Gaz: Who's doing this video?

Hugh: A friend of ours, Marc Costanza from Len. He's hookin' us up with some super 8 film, and we're just getting a bunch of cameras and stuff and we'll just go around. He'll give us ideas and we'll say what we like and stuff.

Gaz: What's it like being on a small label like No Records?

Kirk: We're sort of grown as a band as they've grown as a label.

Phil: Wayne was in university when the label started. Now they've all sort of quit their jobs and are in it for "The Ride."

Gaz: Do you see that the whole east coast scene, the buzz, will survive and not die out?

Kirk: Just when you think it's gone, it comes right back.

Jordi: Before, not many people on the east coast knew how to get in on the whole music industry thing. But now, they're all learning, they're getting their foot in the door. Now they're all gonna stay there 'cause they have the knowledge to get going.

Gaz: What do you think about all ages shows?

Hughie: Our best memories are of dry shows.

Phil: Kids are more enthusiastic than bar shows.

BY JOANNE MERRIAM

REMEMBER seeing Plumtree for the first time when they opened for Cub at the old Double Deuce. They played songs that were a little too ambitious for their skill, but did a mean cover of Joan Jett's "I Love Rock 'n' Roll." Months later, at the release party for their *Flutterboard* cassette in the NSCAD cafeteria, they totally rawked out, but seemed a little nervous of the audience.

Listening to them at the official release of their new CD at the Birdland last Thursday, I couldn't help thinking that they've more than grown into the band they showed the promise to be that night at the Deuce.

Plumtree is: Amanda Braden (guitars, voice), Carla Gillis (guitars, voice), Lynette Gillis (drums), and Catriona Sturton (bass), who replaces founding member Nina Martin, now studying at McGill University. Their new CD is entitled *Mass Teen Fainting* and was recorded at Sound of One Hand in Ottawa. I

Dreams awake

Waster

Christopher Robin Device
Independent

CHRISTOPHER Robin Device consists of Marcus Boudreau and Marcus Webster, both on guitar and vocals. I saw them perform at the Deep Nine Recording Studios in January as a sort of CD release thing that the multiuse space was having for some of its artists.

The performance was in the recording space, metres away from the dozen or so listeners in attendance. Oozing with atmosphere, the space was a perfect place to hear Christopher Robin Device. While they played in the darkened room, a projector ran an old educational clip about the water cycle on a wall behind the band.

For this show the CRD enlisted the help of a drummer and a keyboardist/sampler. The sample artist was none other than Hal Harbour (aka Doug Barron) who recorded and co-produced Waster. Christopher Robin Device's full length tape. He contributed some well placed samples of wind, thunder, frogs, and jet airplanes.

The mood of the performance was much the same as the mood on *Waster*. There were some nice moments in the performance that emphasized the mournful, haunting tone of the group. The original songs consist mainly of simple strumming of guitars, electric and acoustic, that climax and occasionally break into rough distortion. Some effects are used to create the viscous sound of CRD's music, including some fine delay, reverb, and wah work. Notable songs include "Inside," and "Wish the Sky was White" which is not on the tape.

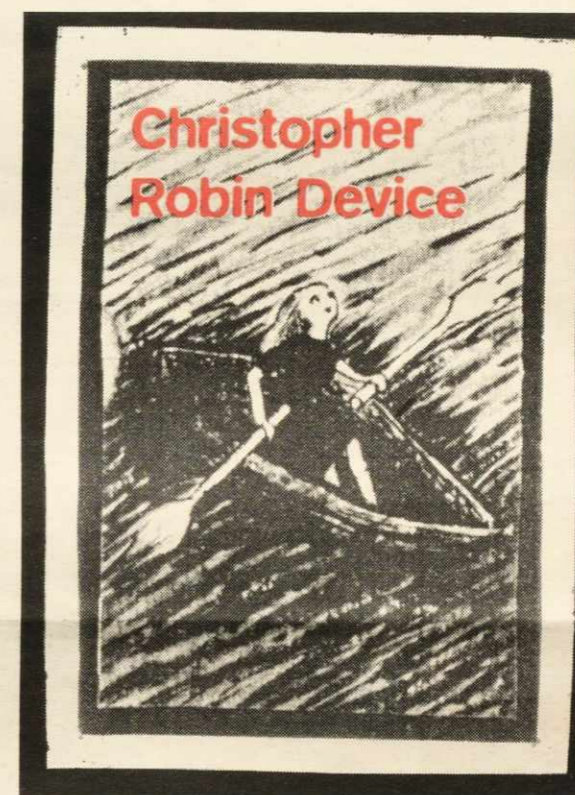
Some songs mildly rocked out at the performance: "Wish..." contained an interesting techno-drum/real drum bridge. But for the most part, the guitars stay clean and the power of the tunes come from the harmonies of the two Marcuses as they slide into what could loosely be described as choruses.

The vocals are echo-heavy; the voice tracks often sound like they were recorded while hopelessly lost in an endless series of caverns. The songs sometimes take on a folk-like feel, but that impression is altered by the chaotic passages.

The pieces coast from start to finish with a sort of heavy fluidity. Sometimes the beat was lost in the tunes when the band strayed too much from format, but the songs that worked made up for this.

The songs on *Waster* are not mosh tunes or happy pop tunes, but have a place all their own. It is an introspective place, one for reflection and dreams awake.

I have been at some parties where CRD would fit nicely between Pink Floyd and Portishead on the stereo, maybe to be followed by Leonard Cohen. The band still has some work to do in solidifying their sound and their skills, and in mak-



ing full use of the potential of samples in their music. When the band reaches its full potential, they will be producing some fine mood-inducing and altering music. But for the moment, CRD's *Waster* cassette is an excellent teaser and a fine first effort.

TIM COVERT

Rome Plows Bountiful harvest

ON Sunday, March 10, the Rome Plows raised the roof at Café Olé. Their aggressive and almost overwhelming sound made them a tough act to follow. The rhythm shifts and cross-cutting structure of the songs really stood out, creating a sort of chaotic elegance.

The Rome Plows are newcomers to the Halifax music scene. They are a three-piece alternative rock band who are certainly worth seeing. Together for just over four months, they've already caught the attention of a music rep. Never plain, never contrived or predictable, songs such as "Two-Twenty, Give Me Back My Book" and "Liar" yield an abstruse quality which is rare and refreshing.

"We looked in the mirror for five years and came up with our own style," joked Mike Begin, who fronts the group.

The sounds and style of the Rome Plows are comparable to the Tea Party. Maybe there's some recent Catherine Wheel-ish angst, and perhaps an added Jazz Butcher

aloofness can be cited here as well. It's not your typical grunge or wannabe quirky music.

It's hard to pinpoint and talk about the music of the Rome Plows objectively. I'm just trying to alert students to entertainment which they can afford. Artful blending and individual talents will tend to speak for themselves.

The Rome Plows consists of Mike Begin, Andy Miller, and Lenny Bowles. They describe themselves jokingly as: "trash-rock," "kinda alternative," "trashers from the old days," and "loud." But they aren't too concerned with whatever's in vogue. Each of these guys have been playing for at least ten years — they are promising chemistry as the Rome Plows. A chance meeting brought them together and their shared expectations cemented them as a group.

There are tentative plans for touring in the summer, but for now it's all up in the air. Financing and transportation are a hurdle as they are for every new group.

"It's kind of like this idealistic

hope that we all have in the back of our minds that we're going to play a show one day with a band who's going to say, 'We got a tour and we want you guys to come with us,'" said Begin. "That would be the ultimate."

Meanwhile, they're compiling phone numbers and looking realistically toward getting a van.

My impression of the Rome Plows was that they take their music seriously but aren't pretentious about their talent. They're good-humoured, and surprisingly mellow compared to the music they play.

Humble and personable in the interview, they were sceptical when talking about their music. For instance, they wondered if their words could replace the experience of actually hearing them.

Well, obviously not, but I needed a quote...

On Friday March 29, the Rome Plows are opening for Hardship Post and the Supervillains at the Birdland Cabaret. Showtime is around 10 p.m. with tickets going for \$6.

GEOFF INESON

Overall, though, the band is very positive about the whole experience, saying that the people at YTV have been very nice, and that they've been getting lots of exposure because of the award.

"One cool thing about the YTV Award is that the Smugglers also won it," said Catriona.

I asked the band what it's like being an all-girl band in the male-dominated alternative music scene. In the beginning, they explain, they got a lot of attention because they were all female, and were frequently referred to as "Halifax's other all-girl band."

"It's something different," said Amanda. "You get that immediate attention, but then you have to work to maintain it. It works both ways."

Are audience members ever rude? "That used to happen a lot," said Amanda. "Some guy would yell 'fuck me.' But that doesn't happen anymore."

The other band members nod, and attribute the change to the band's increased confidence and professionalism on stage.

"What bothers me more is stuff like people assuming we don't know how to do a soundcheck, even though we've been doing this for years," said Carla.

Upcoming plans for the band include a summer tour westward, and their label, Cinnamon Toast, is pushing them to tour in the United States as well. They're also starting to record again.

"We couldn't be very prolific since Nina left," said Amanda.

Lynette explained, "We were always having to teach everybody new bass lines."

Now I've heard *Mass Teen Fainting*. The CD starts off with "Tropical" — which will stick in your head like "Sugar Sugar" and "You Are My Sunshine," only without the annoyance — and ends with Ventures-style guitar picking. "Only In The Movies" has a wonderful all-over-the-place vocal line and funky rhythm. "Shoot to Scoop" hints at a Liz Phair influence and slows their usually enthusiastic pace down a bit, as does "Aquarius" and "Good Time to Tell Me." The new versions of the old songs like "Good Time..." are pretty sharp, too.

Since three of the band members sing, there's quite a bit of variation in the vocals on this record. Amanda's high soprano lead in "3:30 On The Hill" and "Open The Window," and the occasional alto from drummer Lynette on songs like "In The Sink," balance Carla's second-soprano vocals. Carla's singing has a refreshing edge to it in this day of little girl vocalists as in the case of Jewel and the Cardigans.

The only complaint I have about *Mass Teen Fainting* is in its packaging. Call me picky, but the Psycho-influenced shower photo inside misses the point. The band just doesn't look scared, which makes it just another wet t-shirt shot. Combined with the "aren't they cute" media attention that this band usually receives (and, I gather from talking to them, doesn't like), I wonder who's promoting this image — and what they could be thinking.

Mass Teen Fainting can be bought directly from Cinnamon Toast Records, or from most local music stores.

JOANNE MERRIAM

They finally found their new bass player in Catriona. She's in the King's College Foundation Year Program with Plumtree in February. Now they are ready to start recording again, hoping to put out a single on the Inbreds' label, PE.

Any major label interest? "Tonnes," they laugh. "It's kind of a funny thing," said Carla. "People say such-and-such from this label will be at the concert this evening, and then nothing happens."



Plumtree
Cinnamon Toast Records