

Mingling with Matt Minglewood

By Pat Fagan

"This is a true story about growing up in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia." Cheers erupt as Matt Minglewood and his band begin "Me And The Boys," an upbeat ballad, and the dance floor at the Misty Moon fills with both young people and middle-aged couples. He's "back on the road again," hoping to build further on his long-standing musical reputation.

Minglewood is a survivor, a musical force that persists, and, undeniably, a part of the Maritimes' culture. Whereas other performers — April Wine for example — have migrated west to find success, this individual has stayed, and his music has proclaimed what it means to be a "Maritimer." With a new album, band, and tour, it's fitting to look back on the long road Minglewood's taken.

Minglewood began his career playing in Cape Breton with Sam Moon and The Universal Power. After years of touring, he left to form his own group, and the Minglewood Band made its debut in 1977 with the independently released "red album". Full of traditional blues and R 'n' B, the album laid the foundation for the band's direction, with the crowd-pleasing "Caledonia", and the mournful "Stood Up".

Two years later, a national recording deal was reached with RCA, which saw the releases of *Minglewood Band*, a hybrid of high-energy rock and blues. It featured the road anthem, "Rockin' the Blues", as well as renditions of "Buddy and the Boys", "Don't Fool Yourself", the Marshall Tucker Band's "Can't You See" and "Patriot Game", a traditional Irish song. "Dedicated to the Cape", the album brought the band into the Canadian music scene.

"Movin'", the 1980 follow-up, lacked this wide array of styles; instead, it relied on a more straight-ahead blues-rock style, and featured strong songwriting once again. Themes of ambition despite the odds ran throughout the album, particularly in the remade version of "East Coast Blues" — an account of the band's efforts to seek a record deal in Toronto, only to be told "... you're comin' on way too strong, we can't get it on the radio."

By now, the Minglewood Band was riding a wave of regional popularity, while making inroads in Western Canada as well, when *Out On A Limb* was released. Recorded in Memphis, and produced by rhythm 'n' blues legend "Duck" Dunn, the record drew high expectations. It had a distinctly country flavor, especially in "Hank Williams Said It". More importantly, it provided Minglewood's most successful single "Highway To Your Heart." However, RCA's American counterparts refused to release the album in the States, and problems began.

The following year saw many changes: rhythm guitarist Mark MacMillan left to form the Heartbeats, the Band left RCA in frustration over the U.S. deal, and the future definitely looked uncertain. Yet the Band returned in 1982 with a new album, a new guitarist — George Antoniak — and a new record label — CBS. The *M5* album was seen as a compromise by critics who felt the band was selling out to commercialism. Though it was indeed more of a rock album than anything else, it was loaded with

strong musicianship, especially in "Runaway". Others, like "The Tumour" and "Long Hard Climb to the Bottom," full of angry energy, vented a lot of Minglewood's frustration.

After *M5*'s lack of success, Minglewood had had enough of the music business, and called it quits. "We gave our lives to rock 'n' roll," he told one interviewer, "and now we just want to go home. We want to live like normal people do for awhile." Following a few farewell gigs, Matt Minglewood returned to his home and family in Cape Breton to relax for a while.

This year, out of the blue, Minglewood returned with *Me And The Boys* on the independent label Savannah. This new album seems to display all of his styles from all-out country — "Georgia on a Fast Train", to Rock, to foot-stomping, down-and-dirty blues — "Crossroads/Four O'Clock In The Morning", which includes some appropriately sleazy slide guitar work from David Wilcox, another Canadian Blues-rocker. The album on a whole sounds fresh and enthusiastic, which suggests that Matt's year off rejuvenated his creative ability.

Touring once again, Minglewood is achieving a high profile locally and throughout other parts of Canada. During his stop at the Misty Moon, he attracted good-sized crowds who hadn't forgotten the old Minglewood magic. His shows provided a good cross-section of material; most of the new album was performed, combined with Minglewood Band standards; "The Drinker", "Whiz Kids", "Rocket Fuel", and "Dorchester". To round out the show, Minglewood brought out oldies like "Memphis, Tennessee", and "Lucille", with a little "swing jazz" to liven things up.

Minglewood's band is all-new, with the exception of Bobby Woods, who has played drums with Minglewood for as long as anyone can remember. In concert, Woods laid down a solid beat, while Grant Leslie plugged away stoically at the bass. Harpist Roly Platt was impressive in ability and spirit, and did a fine job of the old blues tune, "I Got My Mojo Workin'". John Lee, described by Matt as "the best barrel-house piano player in the country," is a wildman on the keyboards to the point where he almost steals the show.

I say almost, because on pure onstage intensity alone, no-one comes close to Matt Minglewood. When he hits the stage, he keeps up a frantic pace in sets of nearly two hours in duration. Besides an incredible improvement in his guitar technique, he continues to wield smoking lead breaks, most noticeably when "Crossroads" or "Dorchester" launches into overdrive. Despite this, his greatest passion shows in his vocals; he roars majestically through "Can't You See" and makes you feel the pain and anguish. But it's not all that serious all the time. Minglewood is not afraid to have fun onstage and is equally willing to share his sense of humor with his audiences.

Nonetheless, Minglewood's shows leave you drained. There's emotion in every word, every note, and every drop of sweat. And it's only right that the audience feels the heat too; he sings as much about them as he does for them. Perhaps this is the key to his incredible popularity in Atlantic Canada throughout the years. Many of Minglewood's songs are autobiographical, yet they apply to many Maritimers in general — the farmers, the fishermen, the coal miners, Capers,

mainlanders, and so on.

Often, in search of greener pastures, we leave this place only to find ourselves back home again, prepared to accept what we have, rather than what we are. Minglewood knows of broken dreams, doubt and frustration, but he sings too of having that crazy hope to carry on, concentrating on what we have, rather than what we lack. These are the "East Coast Blues", meaning that you may be headed nowhere, so you may as well be having a good time on the way.

Coming from a small Nova Scotia town where Minglewood was virtually worshipped, I can testify that his popularity transcended music. Whether onstage, or on vinyl, his per-

formances were a celebration, a guaranteed good time in a place that was starved for it. Not all of his music is positive; "Can't You See" is a sad lament for the country boy from the Cape who has his heart broken in the big city, yet refuses to "go home a failure." Simply, it's a testament to determination — you'll always have the blues, but life goes on.

Minglewood has had his troubles in the past, and things haven't been easy lately either. His start on the comeback trail was slow at first, and the death of his long-time harpist Enver Sampson, was no doubt a personal blow. Fortunately, things have been getting better for Minglewood. He has a video out for his new single, "Me And The Boys," he's attracted the attention of

the Muchmusic network (which was recently in town to film one of Minglewood's shows — and Charlie Daniels has recorded "Me And The Boys" on his own new album of the same title (which many believe to may be the key to U.S. response to Minglewood's music).

Judging by the reaction of the crowds at the Moon, Matt Minglewood's new material is being readily accepted along with his older work, meaning that he won't have to rest entirely on past glories. Maybe, after singing almost exclusively for Maritimers, Minglewood can reach new audiences and let them know what they've been missing all along down here on the east coast.

Ray Davies' album has impact on emotions

By Carter Newson

The cover of Ray Davies' first solo album, *Return to Waterloo*, is a misnomer: this is actually the work of the Kinks, all of whom appear on the album except Dave Davies. All the songs are written by Ray Davies, which is the case on most Kinks albums. "So what's the difference," you're probably asking.

Well, there is quite a big difference, really. On *Return to Waterloo*, Davies takes a much more personal and introspective point of view than he ever has before, and comes up with quite possibly the most stirring exposition of raw emotion since John Lennon's solo debut.

In case you haven't heard anything about (or from) this little-publicized album, *Return to Waterloo* is actually the soundtrack to a film of the same name which Davies made over the last year. The song lyrics provide the whole script (since there is no dialogue), and the surreal scenes of distorted faces and objects which appear

throughout the film are supposed to reflect Davies' personal view of the world. Although you most likely haven't seen the film, you may have seen the excellent video for the Kinks' "Do it Again", which is an excerpt from the movie.

(Incidentally, three cuts from the Kinks' *Word of Mouth* album — "Going Solo", "Missing Persons", and "Sold Me Out" — appear on this one, in slightly different versions).

The basic gist of the songs — and hence the film — is that sure, you can go home again, but it just isn't the same anymore. The mood is one of bitterness, frustration and shattered expectations — a mood Davies hasn't reflected so strongly since 1969, on the Kinks album *Arthur (or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire)*. In fact, the "Waterloo" he is referring to is Waterloo station, a subway station not far from where Davies grew up, and the inspiration for the Kinks' immortal "Waterloo Sunset".

Davies' personal statements in these songs take on an extremely ponderous,

cynical air. In "Expectations," he sings, "Now all the lies have gone on too long/ And a million apologies can't right the wrong." In "Sold Me Out," he conveys a profound sense of betrayal, which is also the case in the title track, which is a classic example of a sensitive individual trying to come to terms with reality and sort out the truth from all the "bullshine". However, this is done without the self-indulgent trappings which plagued the "sensitive singer/songwriter" movement of the early '70's.

Musically, the album is on a par with any of the Kinks' more recent works. The playing is impeccable and sound surprisingly up to date, thanks largely to keyboard/synthesizer whiz Ian Gibbons. Even when the band rocks out (in songs like "Sold Me Out"), they still play with taste and economy.

By the way, if you're a Kinks fan of any degree, this one is a must-buy because it doesn't look like there'll be any new official Kinks products for a while — not this year, anyway.

