



Photo: Doreen Pines

The band Idyl Tea at Dinwoodie's, opening for Spirit of the West

## Idyl Tea: a local band who makes their own rules.

interview by Stephen Noble

Contrary to popular belief, the absurd is not something which only occurs in existential philosophy and American politics. On Saturday night the Piazza Bar became that most ridiculous thing — the pub without beer. Well, the beer-less bar *did* have a band — Idyl Tea was performing there. I had the chance to sit down with the members of the band and ask them about their careers.

Idyl Tea's enthusiasm for music is immediately obvious. Says guitarist Everett Laroi: "Music is something we like. It's exciting. It's not like a job for us."

This is all very well, I'm sure, but the fact remains that if you're a musician making records and playing gigs, Edmonton is not one of Canada's major entertainment centres. So, I wondered, wouldn't it be better to take the show elsewhere, perhaps to a city with more outlets for independent bands?

Craig Metcalfe, the drummer whom you'll hardly ever catch dropping a beat or not smiling, objects and explains why. "Edmonton has a good music scene that has a firm base. In Edmonton you can do what you want to do and not get torn apart just because you're doing something different.

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People here are good in that way. Some people, though, obviously feel the same way as Moe Berg, (The Pursuit of Happiness), and NEOA 4. They obviously felt the need to move to the bigger market. But take someone like Ken Chin of SNFU. Even after having toured all over this continent, he still firmly believes that Edmonton audiences are the best.

"Certainly it's true that Edmonton doesn't have a lot of established clubs like other bigger cities, but nevertheless this city still manages to support a lot of good bands. Let's face it, if you're really serious then no matter where you are you have to be prepared to go broke for a few years at least."

With already one E.P. and a host of positive publicity from "Graffiti" to C.B.C.'s Brave New Waves, how about the band getting a newer, better record deal?

"Well that sort of brings out one of the problems of not having a manager," replies Metcalfe. "It just goes to show how disorganized we can be!"

"Last year, after the release of our record, we were in contact with someone from Polygram. She liked the record and was

interested. But when she phoned us, we just never got around to returning her call." (There is an outburst of laughter around the table.)

Laroi explains, though, that the intentions of the major record labels are not always as desirable as is commonly believed. "All that

**"All that the big record companies are interested in is making money."**

the big record companies are interested in is making money" — everyone around the table nods vigorously in agreement — "That means that your records have to sell, and they'll play with your sound as much as they have to in order to make that work. Polygram would have wanted to get a big name producer in order to do the production, and there's a good chance that he would have ended up rearranging the songs and giving us a sound that we didn't really want. At the moment we make the rules 100 per cent."

Having complete control of your own music is a situation that most musicians would agree on as ideal, except for the fact that it tends to become rather expensive when making records. What is the possibility of the band making another record?

"I think everyone in the band would be really disappointed if we didn't record another record," Metcalfe says. "I don't really listen to *How I See This Table* very much. Every time I do, I hear things in it that I know we could do better now. At the moment though, the first priority is the tour; so it probably won't be until early next year that things start happening with the record."

Later this month Idyl Tea will leave the River City on a tour that will take them from Halifax to Vancouver, their second cross-country tour. This time they have a few dates with Chalk Circle lined up in the east. When I asked Metcalfe about the tour, he smiled quietly to himself, trying to hide a youthful excitement. "It's something I've always wanted to do," he says. "It's great fun, but there's a lot of long drives. You can never tell what will happen."

Although Idyl Tea's style is not something that you could label as incredibly original, the way in which they execute it makes up for the fact. They are a band with a fresh, energetic sound, and obviously the public is slowly beginning to realize it. *How I See This Table* is even being distributed over Europe and can be heard on radio in such exotic places as Moscow and Glasgow. The future looks bright for this local band: as Metcalfe says, "You can never tell what will happen."

## Making films is living life *On the Edge*

by Elaine Ostry

Recently, the National Social Institute of Edmonton sponsored the Local Heroes film symposium, which featured the works of independent filmmakers. Francis Damberger was the only Edmontonian to show a film at the event; his film *On the Edge* was screened. This film was Damberger's first of what appears to be a promising career.

*On the Edge* deals with the issue of teenage suicide in a surreal style and is, as Damberger says, "designed to stimulate discussion" about this social problem. *On the Edge* was released last fall and won a silver plaque at the Chicago International Film Festival in the category of the social sciences, as well as a certificate of merit. This film festival is actually the second largest festival in North America. *On the Edge* was shown on television by the CBC this summer, and will air on the French channel this fall.

*On the Edge* was Damberger's big break, but it did not come by chance. Damberger is a graduate of the University of Alberta's BFA Drama program, and worked exclusively as an actor for a few years on stage, in television and in films. However, he became "fed up" with what he saw in the film business, an attitude that surfaced with his involvement as an actor in the feature film *Snowballs*, which was a disappointing disaster. Damberger states that he had been "playing around writing a bit" and then told himself "I can do better" — so he decided to make a film.

Damberger then turned his ideas about youth and suicide into a movie, coordinating it with the International Year of the Youth. To produce the film, he formed a company of young, talented professionals and called it the Young Alberta Filmmakers. They received a grant from the government — "enough money to buy the film stock."

The Young Alberta Filmmakers is still functioning. Damberger describes it as a co-operative in which he has "the final say." The company, says Damberger, "wanted to make better and more interesting films" than what was being shown at that time. Now, however, he emphasizes the works of filmmakers such as Anne Wheeler and Allan Stein have improved the quality of independent films.

Certainly the experience Damberger received from his work as an actor has been an advantage to him as a filmmaker. "I have been inside of the process in regards to character, plays and film as an actor," says Damberger. "I understand what it takes to make up a character." He stresses the need for detailed characterization in both acting and directing.

Directing is a challenge for Damberger.

He finds the transition from acting to directing "a natural process". In filmmaking, he claims, there are "lots to feed off of." "Filmmaking is not just film, not just dramatic process, but many other things as well." The director is a "collaborator" who combines the different elements of film, such as "images, actors and music" to produce "one main image, one statement... it all adds up." Probably the greatest challenge for Damberger at first was the technical process of filming. "I still have a lot to learn," says he, "and I am still fairly young (30 years) to be a filmmaker."

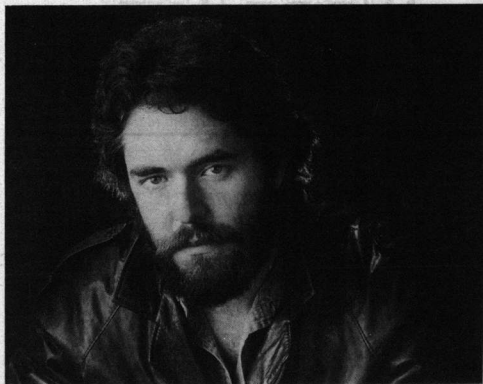
Filmmaking is "a really tough business, especially when you're independent, when you're not doing things that are middle of the road." Damberger's premise is to "show my ideas the way I have them", and this philosophy is proving to be successful, as his films are "well-accepted". He feels that there is "more awareness and acceptance now of independent films, among the film business and the public." People are beginning to realize that "non-traditional films can be interesting."

Damberger's films certainly provide variety. His film *Rat Tales*, which he wrote in 1985 was, in his words, "off the wall." It showed the Alberta Rat Patrol as a metaphor for nuclear war. Damberger is about to release *The Road to Yorktown*, which is about two filmmakers attending their first film festival. It is a satire of "the bizarre world of the filmmaker."

Recently Damberger wrote and filmed a pilot for a comedy series with the university's BFA drama class, called *The House*. It is about a few young people living together in a co-operative. CBC has expressed interest in the pilot, and Damberger intends to develop the project further for consideration.

With the success he has enjoyed so far, one might expect that Damberger move to Toronto, the Canadian mecca of filmmaking. Damberger admits that he had an offer to work in that city, but refused the opportunity. In the comparative isolation of Alberta he finds "more freedom. In Toronto I probably would just end up directing or acting in other peoples' projects. Here, you have to rely on your own imagination." In Alberta, he claims, one has to become "more diverse", and this challenge "brings more out of you; it makes you more of an individual."

Damberger's decision to stay in Alberta also stems from a loyalty to the province. "I was born in Alberta, and I am committed to making things happen here." Certainly this enterprising attitude has its rewards. Referring to his film *On the Edge*, Damberger states: "We made that film on nothing and it turned into something."



Francis Damberger, local independent filmmaker.