

# Buying your way to the top of the charts

by Eric Alper

Say goodbye to the Prince single in a tin, R. E. M. in a wooden casket, Eric Clapton in a 'collectors' edition boxed set including "I Shot The Sheriff" (live), and color postcards and the Pete Frame tree. So long to Sinead O'Connor's "behind the scenes wall chart compiled with Sinead's private photo collection," to Morrissey's CD single in a style-free plastic gatefold, and most gladly, to Violence in a sick bag adorned with "realistic" fake vomit. In fact, farewell to the grand paradise of lifeless packaging.

Buy-ins, posters and mobiles, free gifts - Pop life paraphernalia is everywhere. Record companies, look-



ing for number one smashes, bend the rules and clog up the system, while the mass media unsuccessfully keeps its pages and airtime free from the hype. This isn't new. Throwing

candy to the media has been going on for some 40 years and is more successful than ever; it doesn't seem to be slowing down.

Let's give credit where it is due: the British refined the promotional pop game. In the 50s, weekly music mags started publishing their own record charts and reviews loosely based on scattered phone calls to friends who ran record stores.

The British Broadcast Company, record companies and Music Retailer Magazine (since replaced by Music Week) pooled their resources, hired the British Market Research Bureau and established the first "credible" chart. They set up a panel of 250 'chart return shops' to keep diaries of records' sales which were collected each week. Their first Top 20 was published in February, 1959 and Amen Corner's "(If Paradise Is) Half As Nice" was the number one song - the week before Corner's hadn't even charted.

Once companies could use a chart system to gauge the success of "their" artists, the pop world has been left to wonder which came first, the record or the promo? Is pop success propelled by talent or marketing?

Early on companies recognized that exposure in the press, on TV and on radio, was a one way ticket to making lots of cash. In turn, the media became a tool record companies



Care for some 1992 Ireland Chateau du Pain? Or how about some milk with Michelle Schocked cereal? Afterwards, pick your feet up with The Crowes' songbook. • photo by Eric Alper

sought to control. For the first time a greater emphasis was placed on the audience potential of the different media. Quality lost out to quantity.

But charts make even record companies nervous. They're spotty and won't always give you an accurate picture of pop success. And those early days weren't big on regulations or regulators. It's widely known that some record stores falsified records sales entries and some of them were bribed to do it. A 1980 code of conduct introduced by the British Phonographic Industry and various legislative groups in America threatened to fine and expel guilty parties. The move was largely ineffective, but record companies seem more determined than ever to pour their

resources into influencing positive reviews.

That means reviewers can expect plenty of gadgets and gifts concocted by marketing "artists" alongside that boring old CD that actually contains the musician's work.

The Black Crowes' *Southern Harmony And Musical Companion* was accompanied by a free holy scripture lyric book, Nirvana's *Nevermind* came with bottled blue water, taken from the pool baby Spencer swims in on the cover. and Madonna's "Express Yourself" was enhanced with an extra outer sleeve with genuine zip fly.

T-shirts are also big gift items. It's unsettling but not uncommon to see a writer skin the shrink-wrap off, say, U2's *Achtung Baby*, toss the record into the nearest used record store bin, and walk out well - satisfied to be sporting a new flashy Fruit Of The Loom t-shirt.

The Rolling Stones single, "Between A Rock And A Hard Place" sported three different CDs with mixes, old faithful bonus tracks like "Some Girls" and "It's Only Rock n' Roll", and a deluxe box with poster. It was nonetheless an undignified flop. But record companies feel they must still thrust veterans like the Stones, Bob Dylan, and McCartney into the promo circus ring because, in the out-of-whack market, "album artists" need the media exposure to hawk their wares - and that is almost entirely dependent on the singles chart.

Each week the media is offered free concert tickets and goodies ranging from a Walkman disguised as rather small fridge (Lloyd Cole) to an extremely suave leather jacket (Eurhythms). In fact, a wardrobe overflows with expressions of gratitude: baseball caps and t-shirts (innumerable), smart shirts (David Bowie, KLF), jackets (Phil Collins, INXS), boxer shorts (Beastie Boys), tracksuits (Ziggy Marley), right down to the socks (New Kids On The Block). The only shortfall is in footwear, but don't hold your breath.

Promotion is supposed to spark media response, and it does. Editors ask themselves, "Who's the priority?" and then fit the latest rah-rah review or preview in the time slot or pages. They (record companies) all want your (editor's) attention and the biggest prize wins. It all seems kind of slimy but there's no harm in giving gifts now, is there?

With the holiday season just around the corner favoured dealers and editors may get an interesting surprise in the mail very soon. How about Guns N' Roses bedroom slippers? Or a Sting Brazilian mahogany toilet seat? Or Shane McGowan dental floss? Or Leonard Cohen bondage trousers? Or a David Crosby Shape Up and Dance video? We can't wait.

## Clowns abound at The Poor Alex

by Ira Nayman

*Mump and Smoot* in "Ferno" doesn't have anything quite so visceral as blood dripping out of an unnaturally elongated arm. Oh, sure, there are a couple of missing body parts (one arm and one leg, to be precise) and some goofy spirits (the kind that crack their heads on the ceiling of the theatre); otherwise, there is very little to gross you out.

Which, depending upon how you responded to *Caged*, *Mump and Smoot's* last show, might not be all that bad.

*Mump* (Michael Kennard) and *Smoot* (John Turner) are clowns who mix horror in with their laughter. The local clowns have been performing different shows around Canada since 1988; they made cameo appearances in the short films *The Fairy Who Didn't Want to be a Fairy Any More* and *Lovely Boys* at the recent Festival of Festivals.

The show starts with *Mump* and *Smoot* waiting to catch a plane (actually a hilarious concoction of wooden panels and fans which serves many purposes throughout the performance). A few minutes of clowning makes fun of what people do when they're bored waiting for something.

The story takes off (figuratively



**theatre** *Mump and Smoot* in "Ferno" written and starring Michael Kennard and John Turner  
The Poor Alex Theatre  
until November 29

and literally) when *Mump* decides he can fly the plane himself. Their holiday plans are cut short when their engine conks out; the pair end up...well, you know.

*Ferno* contains most of the pair's comic devices: the strange language that is sort of like English, but not really; audience participation; funny improvisation (in this case, inspired by opening night technical problems); a penchant for grotesque comedy; and, of course, the god figure *Ummo*. It is an excellent introduction to *Mump and Smoot's* oeuvre.

On the other hand, *Ferno* for the most part foregoes the grotesque in favour of more traditional clowning. *Wog*, the malevolent force from *Caged* is sorely missed in this regard. For those who have seen previous *Mump and Smoot* shows, *Ferno* might prove a little tame.

Nonetheless, *Mump and Smoot* offer a fast, funny show that challenges the traditional view of clowns.

*Mump and Smoot* in "Ferno" plays at The Poor Alex Theatre until November 29. For more information, call 927-8998.

## Into the Wee Hours of Days

by Dale Barrett

Days of You are a four piece band who, in a relatively short history, have been taken to by quite a large following across the country.

Not bad for a band who started out as a Grateful Dead cover band. When the Dead weren't on tour, the Deadheads would follow the Days.

Since those days, with their own following, Days Of You have changed their image, and have written their own music - a melange of folk, country, rock, jazz and whatever else their improvisations lead to.

Where many companies and groups claim to be concerned about ecology,

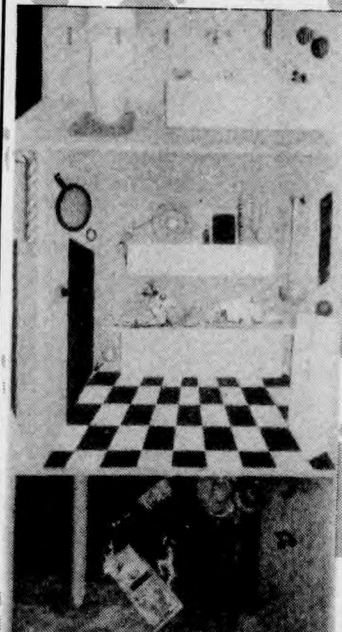
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## Hits 'n' Bits

AROUND YORK

A walk through Atkinson College reveals more than bulletin boards, grad photos and notices (well, there's the *pubs*). Check out the very accessible public art gallery called **The Public Art Gallery** (hence the name!) This is the second year of the Project, bringing the total number of works to eleven. ("Eleven...it's one higher, you know? Where can you go from 10? Nowhere. Exactly. But eleven...")

This year's artists are graduates or students in Atkinson's visual arts program. **Joyce Kline**, an Atkinson alumni and known Toronto



artist whose last professional show was "The Abortion Wars", at the A-Space in 1991 and Saskatoon; **Maureen Montgomery-Blunt**, a teacher who graduated from the College two years ago; **John Benville**, also a teacher, who graduated from Atkinson in the spring and who is now completing his studies at the U of T's Faculty of Education; and **Joanna McEwen**, another teacher who is working toward a degree in Fine Arts at the College.

Also part of this year's edition is a collection of photographs by **Pamela Harris**, which are on display in the College elevator. Harris' photos are of the people of Spence Bay, in the Northwest Territories.

The Fine Arts people present the **Noon Hour Series** in DACARY Hall, 050 McLaughlin College on Wednesday, November 25 at 12:00 (hence the name!). A lecture - performance by **Daniel Janke**, who is a graduate of York's Graduate Program in Music will demonstrate contemporary and traditional styles of music on the *kora*, a West African "harp-lute." The *kora* is the main instrument of the Mandinko griot tradition dating back to the 14th century, which has recently become very popular on the WorldBeat scene. He will also play examples of his own creative use of this instrument in jazz and improvisation ensembles in Canada. For more information, call the Music Department at 736-5186.

— Eric Alper

MUSIC

Montreal's **Ripcordz** (En Garde Records) are Punk Rock. Even to use such eighties terms as hardcore wouldn't work here. The Ripcordz have more in common with Stiff Little Fingers than Born Against or even Bad Religion.

**Kidnoise** is a collection of 21

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