

AN IN DEPTH LOOK INTO THE ECMAS

The ECMAs: Using up your fifteen minutes of fame

continued from page 15...

first on the ECMA list. Some professors from St. FX were playing in a jazz ensemble — obviously trying to supplement their income with a strike looming.

I swaggered inside with my magical pass in hand, but was stopped by a drunk woman collecting tickets. After explaining that media passes allow the media to watch for free, the woman insisted that I pay the cover charge.

"Note to self," I thought. "If I ever play music at a bar, don't let my girlfriend collect tickets while drunk."

The affable owner of the club rescued me from the embarrassing situation, and I got to hunker in the farthest possible table from the

band.

There's something extremely obtuse about jazz bands playing their genre's traditional tunes. I read the audience like a book. Most were staring blankly at the band, trying to understand why they were watching. I soon came to a revelation so profound it stirred me from my seat and straight out the door.

"What did you think?" asked the midget while closing the door of the waiting carriage behind me.

"Traditional jazz is so obscure," I proclaimed. "Only jazz musicians can understand it. People who say they identify with jazz are phoney. Music is entertainment — the audience is the most important part. Jazz is irrelevant because the

majority of the audience doesn't get it."

"How dare you make a such a generalization!" the cook screamed, shaking his spoon.

"Isn't that my job?" I countered. "Aren't the press supposed to miss the point, and thereby fuel idle conversation and more press for an artist or genre?"

I outwitted the cook. He went back to stirring the cauldron. My neck sighed some relief.

"Good for you, Mr. Cullen," said the mutant circus man-child. "Now go see some more instruments being manipulated by humans."

The carriage dumped me at the Blues Corner. A local band known as PF Station was playing. I was angry at having to see this band again. For a year-and-a-half they have been peddling their brand of jam-rock around the city. They're talented, but once you've seen them a few times, rigor mortis sets in.

Another band was setting up when a pimple-faced teenager dressed as a train station porter approached me. He dropped a telegram and I read it.

"Jean Carlo is outside...stop. Go to him immediately...stop."

I left just as the band started cranking out some damn fine acoustic blues. I was vexed.

Outside, the carriage gleamed on the empty street. I rolled up my sleeves and prepared for a yelling match.

"How could you pull me away from such a promising band! I think you're sick people and I've had enough of your mystical antics," I hollered at them.

"Watch-a your mouth, boy," threatened the cook, spoon in hand.

"Yes, Mr. Cullen. We are tired and do not have the constitution to stay awake all night," said the crusty big-top man. "We would like to receive your report and then go to bed. Please don't worry about the blues musicians. They play again Saturday," he noted.

"Fine," I replied. "PF Station got the crowd dancing, but their novelty has worn off for me."

I said that most music is popular only for a short while, and then people get bothered by it. The cook was still perplexed.

"What about if da music is good?" he asked.

"Very rarely is Top 40 music good," I answered.

With that, I found myself at my door with the sound of horse shoes clicking farther and farther away.

I awoke on Friday angry. I was sick of the two weirdos. Needing to rebel against the authority placed on me, I hid in a movie theatre. When I returned home, I found a telegram on my door.

"Very angry...stop. Do not fool around with us or you will get hurt...stop. Trade and Convention Centre tomorrow...stop." It was signed "J.C."

I didn't like being threatened, but I went to the Convention Centre anyway.

I found myself in the basement surrounded by ECMA organizers. They were guffawing and carrying on about what a great job they were doing when some loud music cut off their sentences.

Dangling participles everywhere.

A catchy beat had me looking to the stage. On it sat twenty-five high school kids brandishing an array of instruments; from trumpets to basses to saxophones.

They were playing a cover of Van Morrison's "Moondance", and shaking the booties of all their parents in the audience.

The wall of sound they produced would have driven the timid out the door, but I left for other reasons. The band the freaks had so rudely cut me off from on Thursday was playing elsewhere.

A crowd had gathered to see Isaac, Blewett and Cooper. Word was out that the New Brunswick trio could please almost anyone. I picked a choice seat and hoped with all my might that this weekend's streak of boring and unoriginal music would be broken.

The band started, and from the outset, every song stretched my

cheek muscles and each solo caused me to holler approval. I left the bar happy, slapping people's backs and even offering to help clean up dirty glasses.

I sauntered towards the now familiar carriage. Inside, the freaky duo didn't know how to approach me. The sour disposition I had previously shown them was wiped clean, replaced by happy babbling: "I loved them...they were spectacular..." was all I could say.

Midget-man grinned. "We are happy people with instruments have affected you in such a way."

"Amore," purred the clichéd cook.

Feeling slightly embarrassed that these relative strangers were seeing my emotional side, I switched gears.

"Yeah, well, they were good, but the rest of the bands sucked," I quipped.

Midget and Bonaventura exchanged glances. They were unimpressed. My trite and dismissive statements had pushed them to the edge of a cliff I couldn't see.

"You awful boy!" screamed the midget. "You've been spoiled so much by music in your world that you can't open your ears to anything you haven't already judged!"

I was in full panic. The cook was coming at me with the spoon. The midget had given him *carte blanche* with my body, and I feared the worst.

"Now it's my turn," said the cook with fire in his belly.

I tried to fend for myself, but he was much larger. In no time he had snapped my wrist. He threw my wrecked body out of the carriage while screaming, "Where we-a come from, there is no music. Appreciate what you've got!"

I didn't get it. It didn't make sense. But at least they had the courtesy to drop me in front of the hospital.

Beyond the Maritimes

continued from page 14...

ignoring it. Instead, they keep promoting musicians that have no legitimate possibility of gaining wide-scale acceptance outside of Cape Breton.

The ECMA will only support artists outside of the Celtic/traditional ilk when they make it big beyond the Maritimes on their own (Sloan, Sarah McLachlan), and that's just a self-serving grasp for legitimacy. Anger has been expressed at Sarah McLachlan for shunning the ECMAs, but why? The ECMAs did very little for her, and she didn't ask for any nominations. The ECMA, in a greedy attempt to gain national recognition, put her in an uncomfortable spot.

But this isn't the first time that the association has failed to support emerging artists. In the early 90s when Halifax pop was surfacing, the ECMA shut the bands out. This year they actually let Sloan play at the awards ceremony. They even found it in their hearts to give the Super Friendz the award for best alternative band. Oh yeah, they're broken up. A little late, don't you think?

Despite all of the slights committed by the ECMA, there is really nothing they could do. There isn't a large enough talent base in Atlantic Canada to warrant festivities of this

magnitude.

At many of the showcases, audiences were presented with bands that should have been told to go home to practice some more. With a five dollar cover charge at each bar, that is the least the ECMA and the corporate-sponsored Festival ECMA owed music fans. For the most part, there was not enough talent to justify the drain on consumers' wallets.

The thing is just too damned small time. The more I hear a drunken hick yell "sociable", and the more I hear about Rob Cohn's temper tantrum in which he resigned from his job as director of the ECMA at a brunch in front of his peers, the more I believe that the whole thing could have taken place at the Midtown Tavern and no one would have cared any less. Natalie MacMaster, on national TV, yelling about the two-four and cod backstage at the awards gala sure makes those of us who live here look like intelligent, sophisticated people.

Get out of the lighthouse. Those in charge of the awards have to drop the cultural protectionism and support the bands that have the ability and confidence to go places in the music world. That's the only way to give the awards even a semblance of credibility.

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Knifey Moloko hot and cool

BY GINA STACK

The fresh sounds of Halifax's own Knifey Moloko helped make the Market Street Jazz Cafe one of the hottest venues at this year's East Coast Music Awards.

The band, consisting of a trumpet, saxophone, guitar, violin, keyboard and drums, kept the dance floor packed with a mix of hot and cool jazz tunes.

Many enthusiasts waited close

to an hour-and-a-half to enter the bar.

After a number of lesser known acts warmed up the audience, Knifey Moloko took to the stage at midnight.

The band members took turns showing off their talent with rotating solos and improvisations during the performance. The band got the audience excited during its first set, and then mellowed it out with slower numbers during

the last set.

Knifey Moloko was just one of many acts drawing music fans to the Market Street Jazz Cafe this weekend. Salsa Piquante packed the cafe the night before, and the end of festival bash held Sunday was the hot spot to be.

Saturday night's event was also part of the CKDU funding drive. With a five dollar cover at the door, Dal's radio station easily made more than \$1,400 on the night.

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