

# arts & entertainment

## Groovlama: Right place, right time

by Neil Donald

If you haven't seen them yet, Groovlama is a must no matter what your taste in music.

When I first caught their act at the newly renovated Pub Flamingo I had heard their sound was "gritty tribal funk"; which is both an understatement and an oversimplification. Call what they presented at the Flamingo Hendrix meets the English Beat with arrangements by Jim Morrison and Jello Biafra.

A song-to-song glimpse of their set at the Pub defies any classification except inspired and innovative. First they cook out on raw, dark funk energy mean as hell. Then a song that is attitude art rock with a dash of Bootsy Collins. Then a cover of "Summertime" by Billie Holiday that combines a haunting use of mandolin by bassist Ian Rossiter with the powerful, melodic, raunchy vocals of singer Crystn James. Even without a bass they kept the dance floor full with this normally mellow classic.

Considering how recently the band was formed, the music of Groovlama is amazingly vibrant, confident, and unselfconscious. They have an undeniably innovative approach to their arrangements with an underlying dance appeal. There is a strong personality in their sound, but it is overshadowed by a hard-edged originality that sets their songs apart from each other, let alone

from any musical influence, and defies any attempt to lump their music into any category except "new".

When I interviewed Groovlama they asked me to make sure I emphasize the undeniable talent and importance of the band they opened for at the Flamingo: Big Picture.

Big Picture have been on the scene for years and are one of the tightest original bands that grace the Halifax scene. Their sound is a tight, mean acoustic ska with an incredible range of emotional nuance to the song writing and arrangements that has recently been augmented by the addition of violin. They are a band with two percussionists, both of whom pull their weight, and are fronted by singer Benny Fong; one of the best vocalists in Halifax. I have never seen a Big Picture gig where the dance floor wasn't packed from the opening note to the final encore. As summed up by Lama guitarist Michal Bandak, "They have always been incredibly tight and controlled; the violin adds an element of jam that gives their sound a true emotional appeal."

Besides Rossiter, James, and Bandak, Groovlama is rounded out by guitarist Mikey Halpern, percussionist Andrea Bonomo (who is originally from Italy), and occasional live collaborator singer/percussionist Shivana Sanker.

The individual members of Lama come from a widely divergent international backgrounds.

Lead vocalist James told the Gazette, "I learned to sing in a Church choir in Mahone Bay, and am the 'born and bred' Maritimer of the band."

Bandak, who is in transition from band drummer to guitarist, was born in Washington, DC, and grew up in Vermont, Colorado, Halifax, and California. He met fellow Lama Halpern in

Carbonear, Newfoundland, he was recently the Vice-President of the Conception Bay Folk Arts Society, and is proficient on bass, guitar, mandolin, tenor banjo, tenor guitar, mandicello, tin whistle, piano, bodhrain (Irish drum), and dulcimer. In between getting a degree in sound engineering in Ontario and making a living as a musician in Newfoundland he was part of a song writing duo that wrote contemporary Celtic songs on traditional instruments.

"We're incorporating my Celtic feel into the overall direction of the music," said Rossiter. "Myself and Michal, because we both play multiple instruments, can communicate in any musical media. If we wish to explore other instruments we can mutually cover each other's responsibilities to the band's overall sound."

"Ian's someone I've been trying to find for years," said Bandak. "He's one of the final components to gelling this band."

"Individually, all of the members of the group have sifted through the various currents to get in touch with the best of what's going on in the scene here in Halifax," said Sankar, a fine artist who has played with the percussion ensemble of the Halifax Dance Association. "Through this process some strong friendships have developed that tie the band together."

Though Halpern and Bonomo were unavailable for the interview, their fellow band member profusely praised

their musical abilities.

To date Groovlama have gigged at the Deuce, Cafe Mokka, Cafe Ole, and generally anywhere they can, but they credit the Flamingo and Mokka with giving them their start. "The Flamingo is our central venue right now," said James. "The owner and his new management team have been incredibly supportive of our efforts."

Even after playing "all over the LA/San Fran axis", Bandak praises the Flamingo for having the best sound system he's ever heard.

"We'll play parties, weddings, anywhere we can for anybody who wants us," said James about the Groovlama, who have just become the house band at Mad Man Mont's on Barrington.

If you want to catch Groovlama in action, they are opening for September Child at the Pub Flamingo on November 12 and 13, Friday and Saturday, headlining at the Flamingo December 10, a Friday, and they play at Mad Man Mont's every Sunday and free Saturday they have.

*The music is amazingly vibrant and unselfconscious*

Colorado, where they were childhood friends, and they have been back together since he returned to Halifax this year. Before moving to California three years ago, Michal studied drums and various stringed instruments under Halifax musical guru Jerry Granelli.

"In California I played guitar and bass for bands from LA, Santa Barbara, and San Francisco," said Bandak. While there he also studied production under Caleb Quinn in the production company "Wavespell"; a company that produces, organizes, and records "a galaxy of bands in the Bay area."

It is a simplification to call Rossiter a bassist. From a musical family in

## Gibson's *Virtual Light* Tastes great, but less filling

by Leslie J Furlong

Whenever I think about William Gibson, I can't help but be reminded of Orson Welles. It's a familiar story: the artist creates a work that becomes the

**LITERATURE**  
*Virtual Light*  
William Gibson  
Seal Books

yardstick by which all that follow are measured, and those that follow can't avoid coming up short in the comparison. I guess that is the price to be paid for having a fresh vision and revealing it at the proper moment.

Gibson's *Citizen Kane* was *Neuromancer*, a dystopian novel that signalled the beginning of the Information Age and an end to future visions of glass-domed cities and a robot in every home. With that Triple Crown-winning novel Gibson was placed at the forefront of science fiction's then-latest movement and added to the vocabularies of the world's technophiles. It's really hard to top that sort of achievement, so Mr. Gibson does the most logical thing under the circumstances. He doesn't try.

Gibson doesn't attempt to make *Virtual Light* a ground-breaking novel, and the book is better off that way. He seems to sit back, relax, throw out the

style manual and let the story come.





The book is essentially a crime or mystery novel at its heart, adorned in the chrome and silicon trappings of the near future. The Macguffin is a pair of information-processing goggles that fall into the hand of a bicycle messenger. The bad guys want them back, of course, and so the chase begins through the streets of San Francisco and the sprawling squat that was once the Bay Bridge, written in an easy, hard-boiled style of prose that never gets in the way of the plot.

It's the ideas, however, and not the story that prompt people to read Gibson's fiction, and that's understandable. The story in *Virtual Light* is just a tool to put forward his vision of a future, one that puts such a high regard on current information that any sense of history is lost. The main protagonists in the novel are people who just live for the moment because the society around them

teaches it is the only time that matters. Some incidental characters spend the course of the novel looking for direction, through either the study of others or the adherence to new high-tech religions, while the secret to locating oneself is left residing in the minds of the older characters.

In the end, Gibson seems to be telling us a joke. The joke is that this is a work of fiction, and if you look hard at the details, it proves to be otherwise.



  
**Spirit of the West**  
 \$20 faithlift tour   
 with special guest **andrew cash** and the little ones  
**THURSDAY NOVEMBER 4**  
**REBECCA COHN THEATRE**  
 **TICKETS AVAILABLE AT**  
**REBECCA COHN BOX OFFICE**  
**OR CALL 494-3820 TO CHARGE** 

J.J. ROSSY'S PRESENTS...  
**SELECTROUTION**  
 an Exciting NEW Promotion  
 for "Singles"  
  
**IT'S A GAME OF HIGH-TECH FLIRTATION**  
**Every FRIDAY NITE**  
**from 9:00 pm till close**  
 Starts Friday October 15th  
**Check it out!**  
J.J. Rossy's • Granville Mall, Granville Street • 422-4411

  
**ARE YOU IN A HURRY?**  
 Join us at the  
**GRAWOOD LOUNGE**  
 every Thurs & Friday for our  
**Lunch Buffet.**  
 (11:30 - 1:45 pm)  
 Enjoy Chicken, Hip of Beef., Pasta, Salads, etc. for only  
**\$5.50 + Taxes**  
 Ask your Food Service Waiter/Waitress for your Buffet Card and enjoy your 5th Buffet for  
**FREE**