

arts & entertainment

BIG ethel and Road Apples—high energy from start to finish

by Ben Clark and Sam McCaig

First of all, we ran out of gas. No, not halfway through the concert due to frenzied slam-dancing, but five minutes before the concert because we lent the car to some knob so he could pick up his girlfriend at the airport.

Of course, the closest gas station had no jerry can to lend us, so a foray into the nearest garbage bin was proposed and seconded. The prize was a slightly soiled, one-litre plastic container. And, after three (expletive) trips from the (expletive) gas-guzzler to the (expletive) service station, ignition was finally obtained and Operation Transportation was underway. Needless to say, our "Yay, let's party" attitude had denigrated to one of "Let me at the f@!#ing mosh pit."

Again, disappointment. We expected to be greeted by blasting tunes and a rocking throng of alcohol-propelled frosh. Instead, there was nobody on stage and everyone was sitting on the floor, high-school assembly style. Deciding that this scene was too crazy for our own safety, we beat a hasty retreat to the bar.

From this point on, the evening took on a rosier shade.

Halifax's own BIG ethel soon took the stage and proceeded to shake the McInnes Room for 45 minutes. Led by the theatrics of lead singer Jamie Ferris, the band transformed the once-docile audience into a mass of dancing fools. But what else would you expect from a group named after a moonshine still?

Their music was high energy from start to finish and the crowd responded by quickly forming a no-holds-barred mosh pit. Patrons slammed to a hard-edged, guitar-oriented sound inspired by bands like the Cult, Soundgarden and the Tragically Hip.

However, in an age where "clone" bands are a dime a dozen, BIG ethel established a sound distinctly their own. Every song was an original—all tunes were composed by the band. Lead singer Jamie Ferris is mainly responsible for the lyrics, while Bob Murphy (drums), Tim Manuel (lead guitar) and Blaine Morris (bass) contribute the music.

The group has been together for a year and a half and have enjoyed success on both the local and national levels. After winning a regional "Battle of the bands", BIG ethel earned the right to perform at "Sunfest" in Gimly, Manitoba. This concert (attended by 35-40,000 people) was headlined by Pearl Jam and also featured Sass Jordan, Skydiggers, The Pursuit of Happiness and Blue Rodeo.

While this type of exposure is invaluable to local groups such as BIG ethel, band members are quick to point out that such recognition must be earned.

"We've got to believe in ourselves before we can expect anyone else to believe in us," stated lead guitarist Tim Manuel.

The stage was then turned over to

the night's headliner, Road Apples, the Kingston-based Tragically Hip cover band. And what can we tell you that you couldn't already guess? They played exclusively Hip tunes and they did it very well.

Lead singer Mike Compeau and lead guitarist Rob Lord were supported by rhythm guitarist Derek McGihon, drummer Brad Wood and bassist Mark LaForest.

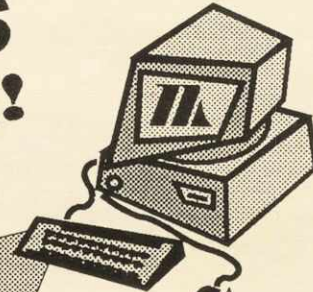
Obviously, a cover band runs the risk of never distinguishing them-

selves from the group that they mimic. However, in the Road Apples' case, their success and acceptance from St. John's, Nfld. to Thunder Bay, Ont. (their westernmost concert date) seems to indicate that they have etched out their own niche on the Canadian music scene.

As Tragically Hip wanna-be's, they look the part, act the part and certainly sound the part. Maybe

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