

arts & entertainment

Having a chat with Doctor Deuce

For over a decade Greg Clark has been associated with Halifax's alternative music scene. As one of the original owners of the Flamingo, whether as a club or a pub, he provided venues for new music to be performed and witnessed by the city's self-proclaimed marginalized youth, an activity that he continues to pursue with fervour at the Double Deuce.

With all the attention being given to the local music scene during the past year and the recent closure of the Flamingo, Mr. Clark's profile has become that much more prominent. In this interview, conducted at his apartment under the close supervision of his cat, Greg talks about Halifax's new music history, where it is now, and where it is possibly going.



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Leslie Furlong: I'd like to know about the actual origins of the Flamingo. Was it back in '83, was there a club then?

Greg Clark: Yup. It would have been fall of '83. In the same space where Alfredo, Weinstein, and Ho is now. It wasn't as nice, though.

LF: No?

GC: No (laughs). They've spent some money on it. It was a cool little space, though, before.

LF: With picnic tables?

GC: Mhmm. I think there was four there, maybe five. They weren't even good ones. They were cheap, all warped and stuff.

LF: What kind of bands were around in '83?

GC: Staja-Tanz, which were pretty popular. They had Alison Outhit as their lead singer, who is in Bubaiskull now. Registered Vote were around -- sort of a Clash type band. Metal bands. Club Med, The Realists. You're talking about six or so bands probably.

LF: What happened to the Grafton Street location?

GC: It was a pretty low frills thing, for sure. The lease was month to month, the building was under threat of being sold, and the architect firm that was inevitably going to design the building was a neighbour of ours, so we weren't popular because of noise from sound checks and stuff, and basically we had to put in another fire exit to do shows there. It's a good thing that I decided not to do the fire door because it was only months later that the building was sold. Then I did shows in that same building in another space which was around the corner. I did six shows there and then started working on trying to get another club space going.

LF: Getting another club space?

GC: That's where we ended up being. We tried to get right downtown. At that time I became partners with Keith Tufts and Derek Konig and then we did shows independently, we recorded the *Out of the Fog* album, did shows in the McInnis Room -- quite a few there. And worked on getting another location and we ended up going up to Gottingen because it was a fantastic deal for the theatre.

LF: What was the lag time between Grafton Street and there?

GC: We opened up there in the fall of '86 (Hallowe'en). That was a weird night. A really weird night.

LF: How weird?

GC: We'd never expected the turnout we got, that's for sure. We were still putting down the dance floor when people were starting to come in and ofcourse they were all dressed up and we had over 700 people. And we had all these crazy horror films in our video setup going. Gross stuff, lots of gross stuff. Our video guy was from the States, Minneapolis. He liked to shock people a little bit, and he didn't have to do much to shock people from around here.

We thought we were gonna be rich after that first show but it didn't turn out that way. You would never get the feeling that there was a really good vibe going on. It was big venue, so we had to start diversifying and do some bigger shows, like the

Wailers and John Cale. The movies never really took off and that was probably the key to the place actually working. We had the big screen and stuff but people never thought of us as a theatre. They thought, if I come to see a movie here there's going to be a bunch of kids running all over the place.

LF: Why all ages at the beginning?

GC: At the time the Grafton Street Cafe was around, that was a coffeehouse, and I liked that sort of idea. I was really undercapitalized, I didn't have enough money to really get into a coffeehouse, which would have been cool. Maybe people would have felt more like it was a club, you know, a place to hang out, and it just seemed like the young bands weren't getting a chance. At the time, the Liquor Board wouldn't allow underage people to play live music in a bar -- now you can if you get permission, that's a recent thing. I thought that was part of the problem with the whole music scene, how stagnant it was. Young bands had no place to play. From the arcade (Backstreet Amusements), I could tell that kids were looking for a place to hang out, and I wanted to try and give them something a little bit better than the arcade, and plus, to give the bands a place to play, and hopefully stuff would develop from them having a venue. So that was the original concept.

LF: It shifted when you moved to Maritime Centre.

GC: Yeah. Well it started to shift up on Gottingen. We had already started to do a few blues things up on Gottingen. We actually had Clarence Gatemouth Brown booked in, and he played at the Carpenters' Hall (now Wormwood's Dog and Monkey Cinema), because we sold before he had a chance to play at the other club. And the Wailers... I liked all kinds of music. We didn't really know the bar market that well, either. So we figured that you had to do a lot of different things, that the alternative scene certainly we didn't think was strong enough, with the 19-and-over crowd to be able to support a bar, so we consciously decided to do a mix of things in the Flamingo.

LF: How long were you with the Flamingo downtown?

GC: About two years. I left in September '88.

LF: So you left the Flamingo in 1988 to do...

GC: To do nothing, because I wasn't allowed... when we started Flamingo, we formed a corporate structure. Then we all agreed to sign a non-competition clause, that said if you ever left the organization, that you would have to stay out a year before you could do the same kind of business in the metropolitan area of Halifax-Dartmouth. So for a year I wasn't able to do anything and then we had a dispute about when I actually left because I didn't get anything signed on paper to prove when I left, and it stretched out to sixteen months, basically, through lawyers having to fight about something that probably shouldn't have had to be fought about. Always get things in writing.

LF: Why did you leave?

GC: I left for a lot of different reasons. We were a three-way partnership... A lot of people say that's never good because sometimes it can end up with one party being shut out of certain things, power struggles and all that sort of stuff. I just wasn't enjoying the working relationship that I had there with my partners and was feeling that I didn't have a lot of say anymore in what was going on.

I knew it was going to be hard to be out of it for a year but

Too much power in any one place is not very good.