

Fish, Satan Make for Strange Bedfellows

by Gene Kosowan

At the very least, it's a sardonic twist to **The Jazz Butcher** 1986 classic "The Devil Is My Friend."

And **Pat Fish**, alias the Butcher himself, back in Canada to support his new Mercury-Polygram album *Big Planet Scarey Planet*, recalls coming to terms with the horned wonder—in this case, the dreaded Reagan-Bush empire.

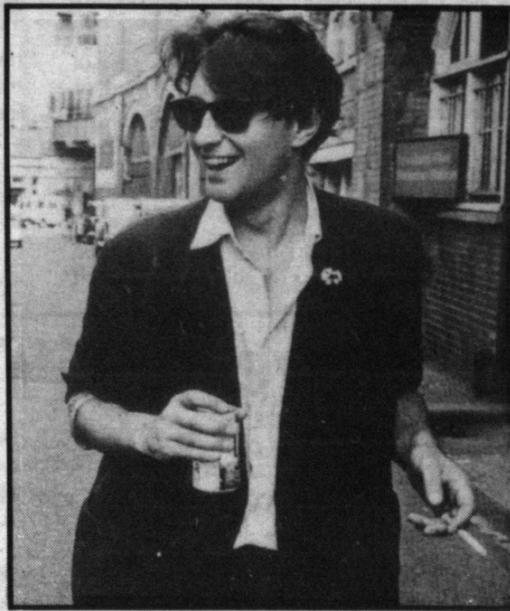
"When we first came over in this direction in '86, we kind of got it into our heads that America was the Great Satan," said Fish to FM88 radio personality **Mike Kelly** before a sold-out Dinwoodie performance November 28.

Logging countless tour bus miles and playing to blue-collar people similar to those from his industrial Northampton upbringing, not to mention exchanging vows of betrothal with an American, changed his perceptions.

And there's little doubt that exposure to The New World has led to a greater appreciation for this continent's frontier mentality. The new album, reuniting Fish with producer **John A. Rivers (Love and Rockets, Dead Can Dance)**, not only rings of American working-class values, but reinforces earlier influences like **The Velvet Underground** and **Jonathan Richman**.

The guitar-ridden "Line of Death" and "The Word I Was Looking For" parallels the social cognizance and proletarian philosophy of a **Michael Stipe** or even a **John Cougar Mellencamp**. For those more accustomed to The Jazz Butcher's campiness, "Do the Blubonic Plague" delivers all the quirky goods.

Fish's wry sense of humor not only helps him generate great songs, but provided him with the means to get established during the post-punk days of doom when **Bauhaus** and **Joy Division** reigned supreme. He had to contend with that aural apocalypse at his first show in 1982 when he was persuaded to open for a friend.



"We were excreting building materials at the prospect of doing this," recalls Fish. "We got up there and (the audience) just sat up there and laughed at us. By the end of it, this guy says, 'Will you do an album?'"

Since then, it's been a wistful excursion of discovery.

"Imagine that you're marginally intoxicated and someone delivers you a couple hundred bucks and drops you in the middle of Toys 'R' Us. And you go doughnuts poking all the stuff, like those interactive museums you can get. For me, that's what it's like."

Despite the constantly rotating line-up of The Jazz Butcher's group, once repleted with the likes of **David** and **Kevin Haskins (Bauhaus, Love and Rockets)**, Fish claims that his quest for new ideas will always remain static.

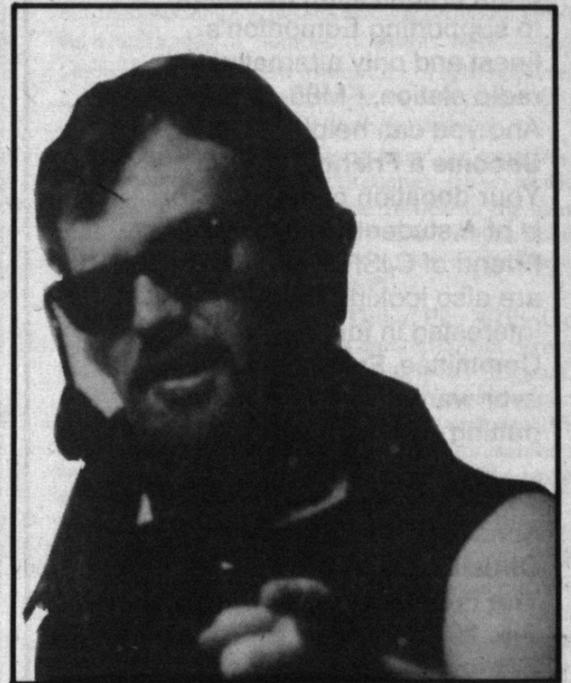
"Obviously, sometimes you fall flat on your face," he said. "But at least you've had a go."

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Fat Rock



by Mike Fy

"Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the next great fat man of rock 'n' roll, **EJ Brule!**"

That's EJ's favourite introduction, either live or on his new tape *Freedom of Speech*.

Hailing from Montreal, E J Brule is definitely not your average solo singer-songwriter. The difference between him and anyone else is that EJ can sing and have a band in the background, all by using his voice.

"I usually play a broom or hockey stick," he said.

So with a natural ability to imitate other instruments, and some help from \$2,000 worth of electronics, he basically reproduces the band himself.

It may seem like starting out in Montreal comedy clubs wouldn't seem right for a musician, until you hear how funny he is. Since he was a one man show, he got paid for playing while bands changed equipment.

"If you can make the punk rock kids watching 'Vomit and the Zits' laugh, the comedy audience is going to be a lot easier."

If you ask him if he considers it a music act or comedy, he says, "They don't have a category for me. Like I say in one of my songs, I get flak from the left and flak from the right. The comedy people may go through great pains to explain what I do isn't comedy, but when I do it in front of a musical audience everybody's laughing."

Not all of the music which surrounds EJ is about making people laugh.

"The comedy clubs are real right-wing places," he said. "There's not much room for thinking in those places."

In mid November, during a whirlwind tour, EJ managed to materialize long enough to play three or four dates in Edmonton. Even though the houses weren't packed everyone seemed to love his show.

"I'm just a funny guy who makes noises with his lips," he shrugs.

With the possibility of EJ returning in February, it's a show that those who missed should witness.

Toronto the Hard Way



by Gene Kosowan

For **NEO A4**, playing back in their old stomping grounds of Edmonton during a three-night stand at the Power Plant early November was, quite literally, a breath of fresh air.

"One thing we missed about Edmonton was the air and the water. Toronto's really filthy," said the quartet's drummer **Joel Anderson**.

But there's no denying that the gamble to relocate to Toronto three years ago has paid off, albeit in rather minuscule dividends so far. Their new album on Duke Street Records *The Hard Way* was released in September, with the first single "That's the Way" added on to almost ever major contemporary station playlist across Canada. A new single "Calling You" hopes to at least duplicate that feat.

But while sales of the new album have surpassed last year's eponymous release, which sold 10,000 copies, the lack of impact in the U.S. and the independent status of their label are obvious concerns.

"We're not **Alannah Myles**," said Anderson. "The

LP got killer reviews, but I wish we had more sales to match them."

Part of the reason for the nice accolades has been NEO A4's return to a more "honest" sound. Eschewing the toys and gadgetry that dominated their last release, the group recruited multi-instrumentalist **Doug Radford** (who played with the now-defunct Edmonton band **Darkroom**) to complement the line-up of Anderson, guitarist-vocalist **Rick Johnston**, and bassist **John Tidswell**.

"There's no machines on this record!" exclaimed Anderson.

"Now with Doug playing bass, John and Rick can both play guitar. It's a lot more fun for me to play."

The decision to use Toronto producer **Chris Wardman (Blue Peter, The Pursuit of Happiness)** over **Colin Thurston (Iggy Pop, Duran Duran)**, who was at the helm for last year's LP, seemed to suit the band's fresher direction.

"He took more chances," said Anderson. "And he shares the same heroes as us. We'd do something and he'd say 'Gee, this sounds like *Physical Graffiti* or *Simple Minds*.'"

Snootsville hasn't taken NEO A4's rock-oriented surrealism to heart the way Edmonton did since the band's inception in 1983. After being signed to Duke Street in 1986 on the strength of a self-released EP and full-length album, moving to the country's musical Mecca seemed disillusioning.

"Toronto bands are concerned more with image and more peripheral items, where I find bands out west are concentrating more on music. There's a lot of bands out there (in Toronto) who can't play worth a fuck but look great."

Although the band can fill spots like the Horseshoe and the Diamond, fitting into Toronto's musical mosaic has been a struggle.

"It's sheer competition," said Anderson. "The **'Stones** can be down the street the next night. You have to be in the scene long enough to float to the top."