

## The grande finale: rock stars in swanky digs

Neo-hippies. Blown out eardrums. A rap concert? The expected surprise. Crazy, sweaty, middle-aged people banging on every instrument.

Five acts exposed five different scenes at the Lord Nelson Ballroom, site of the Grand Finale of the Halifax On Music Festival. The Vees, Number One Cup, The Rascalz, Sloan, and Yo La Tengo played at the all-ages gig on Sunday afternoon in front of a diverse crowd that served as a microcosm of the largely segregated Halifax music scene.

The Vees performed a non-descript set of their brand of Halifax slacker pop. As the opening act, they had the unenviable task of trying to liven up an unsettled crowd. It was under the auspices of the-artists-formerly-known-as-Jale that the first wave of fans began to assemble themselves. The ballroom was a Beck video waiting to happen, both in terms of fashion and the ubiquitous presence of a jazz-spinning DJ.

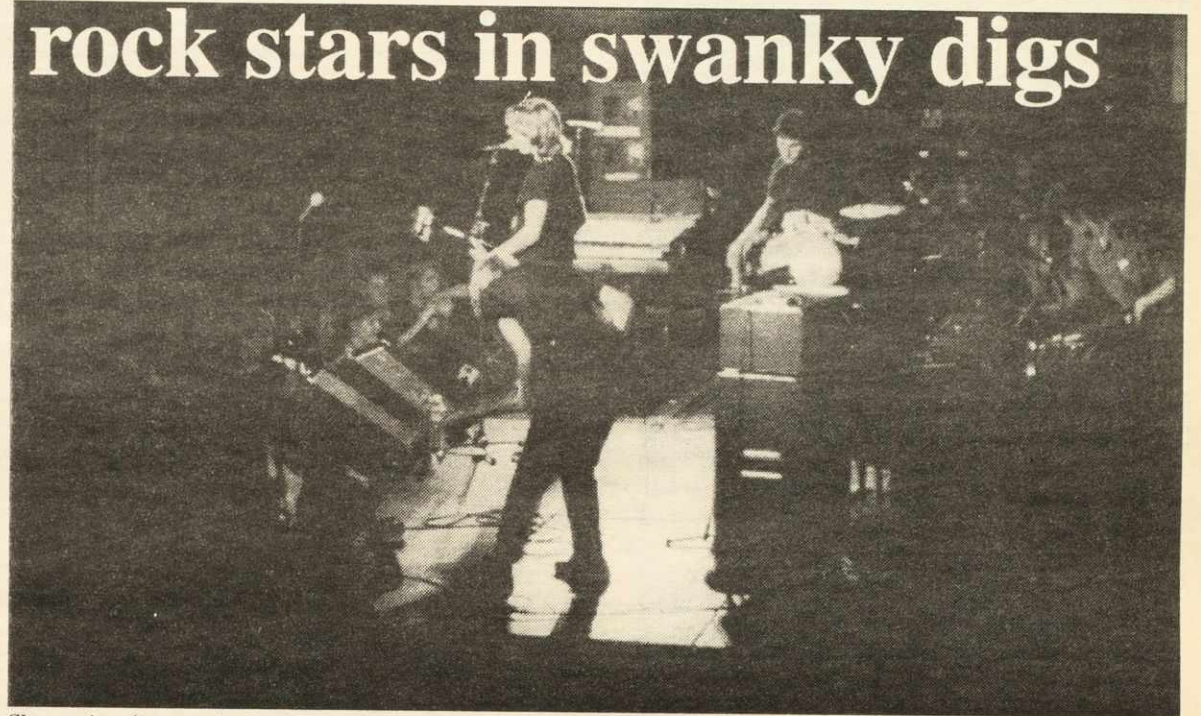
The crowd, largely unchanged,

then had their eardrums shattered by power-pop specialists Number One Cup. With a carefully administered mixture of brain-tingling bass and DNA-altering distortion, Number One Cup proved themselves to be a truly powerful band with a unique blend of melody and attitude.

Number One Cup's departure was met with the unfortunate exodus of the majority of the crowd. Their place was amply taken by a mass of Tommy Hilfiger-adorned teenagers, plus a number of more mature fans. The Rascalz proceeded to satisfy the hungry crowd to its apex of energy. The Vancouver hip-hop trio was novel for two reasons: first, simply because of their chosen genre, and second, because of their unique set, which featured their DJ and their two dancers, much to the delight of the partisan crowd.

As fast as the hip-hop crowd came, they disappeared, replaced by a largely separate and even larger throng of fans, in anticipation of the supposed "surprise" band, Sloan.

The fabled Halifax quartet performed a set comprised mostly of fresh material,



Sloan mixes it up at the Lord Nelson. Photo by Ryan Lash

along with classic standbys like "The Good In Everyone" and "Penpals". The fact that most of the crowd just arrived (again), coupled with Sloan's apparent indifference to playing yet another Halifax concert, resulted in an uninspired performance.

In Halifax there are few things more

difficult than taking the stage after Sloan. Fortunately, organizers of On Music found the ideal band in Yo La Tengo. The name of their latest record is *I Can Hear the Heart Beating as One*, but on Sunday night we saw that *Heart*, especially in front-man Ira Kaplan, who played with a frenzy of skill and

passion. Comprised of three decidedly ordinary people, Yo La Tengo epitomized the hard work-ethic of an underground band. Playing music never looked so hard, but it rarely sounds so sweet.

SOHRAB FARID AND GREG MCFARLANE

## Credibility and Consciousness

*Rascalz bring respect to the mainstream*

BY SOHRAB FARID

Vancouver's Rascalz are a rare breed in contemporary hip-hop. Enjoying what is next to impossible in the United States, Misfit, Red 1 and Kemo have both street credibility and mass exposure. The recent MuchMusic Award winners were in town to rock the set at the Grand Finale of the Halifax On Music Festival, the only hip-hop act to perform all week. Under the roof of the Holiday Inn lounge, The Gazette managed to catch up with Misfit...

**GAZ: What's it like being the only hip-hop act at a rock venue?**

Misfit: Sometimes its good, sometimes it gets overpowered by the ambiance they have for the show, they are looking forward to rock groups, and there's one group that sticks out, and everyone is kind of astonished. It has its pros and cons.

**Well, you went on tour with Treble Charger, so your used to it, right?**

Yeah, we played two gigs with them, and the first gig, as soon as we played everyone was gone, and there were 8-20 people left for Treble Charger. And then for the next show, there were only 15-20 people watching us. It kind of balances out.

**Rap encompasses a lot of different styles. For instance Kool Keith isn't the same as Puff Daddy, but they are both called rap. How do you distinguish yourself in the market?**

As far as being ourselves, we have each of our own lives and interests. As far as hip-hop is

concerned, you have the old school, and what's gone on in the past and how it effects the future as well as the present. But also, we are in the present and we aren't the people who were there in the past. So as listeners of old music and producers of new music, we have to understand what is revolving around us today and progress with that environment, and also understand where the roots are, where they lie and what boundaries you cannot cross.

**Is it a conscious effort to stay within these boundaries?**

As far as topics, it is a conscious effort. There are certain things and ways to discuss so that everyone isn't running around singing only your chorus, not knowing your lyrics. That's not what hip-hop is about. Its there to be made to satisfy yourself as an artist first, and if it crosses over to satisfy the masses then that's cool too.

**While much of your audience was sporting Wu-Wear and Tommy Hilfiger, you rocked it wearing sweatpants. How would you explain this to the kids in the audience?**

Well, when I was in high school I was all about name brand this and name brand that, but you grow out of that. As far as dress code, people watch TV and think that's the way hip-hop is supposed to be, but as they grow older they realize its your consciousness and attitude that's really going to stand out to other people. Kids don't realize that most guys get their gear in the video for free, and that they don't actually dress like that all the time. For me, a

pair of sweatpants is the most comfortable thing. I grew into that.

**How does this relate to image and being a hip-hop artist?**

You do basically have to have an image, but your image can't be gold chains and a Tommy Hilfiger jacket; it has to be an image of a certain style of being an MC. As a hip-hop listener, you need to be able to know the music, you don't have to look a certain way.

**Being synonymous with Canadian hip-hop, do you feel any obligations?**

There is an obligation to pave the road for who wants to come afterwards. But if you are the first and you completely bomb, it makes it that much harder for the next man. Our obligation is to maintain our status, to keep making good music and to open people's eyes to hip-hop.

**Can Canadian artists such as yourself find a niche in the American market?**

To me hip-hop is universal. It is different in different countries, but it is still hip-hop. So the Rascalz have a unique sound, so people might label it as a Canadian style. There's definitely a sound Canadians need to produce, so we can be original. We have to in order to enter the American market, which we have to do, because its part of the world we want to conquer. There's no sense just being satisfied. It's like having a quarter of a glass, when there's the rest of the jug there, and you are not willing to pour it.



The Rascalz command the stage at the Halifax on Music Festival. Photo by Ryan Lash

## Elevator to Hell

Elevator to Hell played an impressive show last Friday, opening this year's Halifax On Music Festival: Cafe Olé was packed. It was hot, and it was loud, but it was worth it.

I had the opportunity to speak to Tara White (bassist) the day before the show.

"We like playing all ages shows better. [The fans are] more excitable, bar shows are more melancholy," she said. Well, this all-ages show was well appreciated by their fans.

Everyone stood, almost in a trance, slowly nodding their heads to the beat as the band took us through their set. They played a good mix of songs from their first album, *parts 1-3*, ("Three more

weeks", "A-void the out-side", "my head"), and the newly released *Eerieconsilation* ("To Breathe", "Every Channel", "Backteeth"), even throwing in a couple of brand new ones, one of which was no more than a week old.

The new album is more live sounding, mentioned White. On *Parts 1-3* there are a lot of keyboards and over-dubs. They even used such inventive instruments as pencil-crayons and a Pringles can on "rather be".

"We use whatever sounds good," White said. "But these parts are hard to play with only three members."

This was apparent at last Friday's show when they played "Roger and the hair", minus the keyboards, as

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