

## Pontiac — getting down to getting it down

by Keith Layton

most of this stuff a while ago when I talked to Rault — he's the guitar player for Pontiac. Since we got together and talked some more, and this is what comes out of all that stuff he was telling me.

Lionel (his friends call him "the linedriver" and "a-bitch" if that don't suit him good too, the way he goes to playing that gee-tar of his) has this band he calls Pontiac. They's a local band, and on top of all that they play blues. Those are a couple of things that Lionel tells you without holding back on it some 'cause a lot of folks putting down stuff about local bands and especially about blues bands, that makes it hard for you to be either of those two things.

"We're a band that plays the blues; we're not a blues band," what Linedrive will tell you. "And not to be confused with playin' at the blues." Linedrive don't want to be thinking that kind of thing 'cause he believes in being faithful and what he says is that "the things I see in a picture to remain faithful to."



When we were talking we got a hold of the idea of people some of the things that led up to what is now...Lionel's been playin' with his brother, Rault, and Chris Nordquist for a long time both in Vancouver and wheresoever else too. Ron and Lionel played with Willie and the Walkers together, back in the 60's. Willie and the Walkers got themselves a gig that got played on the radio in '66.

That scene broke up after awhile though and Ron and Linedrive got themselves a band called Tonto. They started gettin' out of playin' commercial music so they started in on what Linedrive calls the underground music of the day...the Birds, the Moby Grape... That stuff was "the first signs of traditional" according to him and every time they got more and more that way.

Wind was the next band Linedrive was in. By the time he was startin to get close to the blues. He was playin' "second-hand blues" that he was playin'. It was a band that changed his mind though. After he got to know you know he really got after the blues.

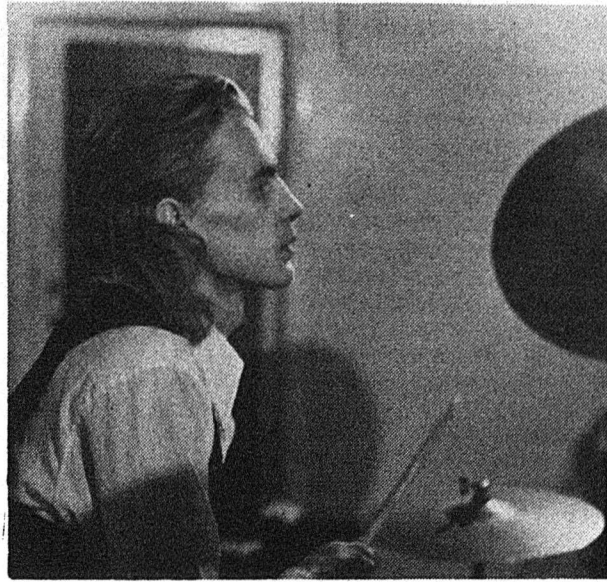
When Kennedy played bass in that band and he was the one that turned Lionel around so far. Thunderbird was right after Kennedy had come back from the States — Kennedy had been workin with all the heavy blues and there. The music they were doin was a lot of hard blues and roll and blues — Chuck Berry, Elmo James and that gig lasted ten months.

Meanwhile, in Vancouver Ron Rault and Chris Nordquist were playin in a band called Nighthawk, at the tit clubs. Linedrive went out there and got to know the scene once he put down Thunderbird. At that time this guitar player Ron and Chris were together with moved on and took the name Nighthawk. That left Linedrive, Ron and Chris together to come up with a name for their band. They liked the name

Pontiac kept on with the tit club scene for a ways. They got to where they were wanting some more money than that six-night-a-week-six-hours-a-week-three-hundred-bucks gig though and came to Edmonton.

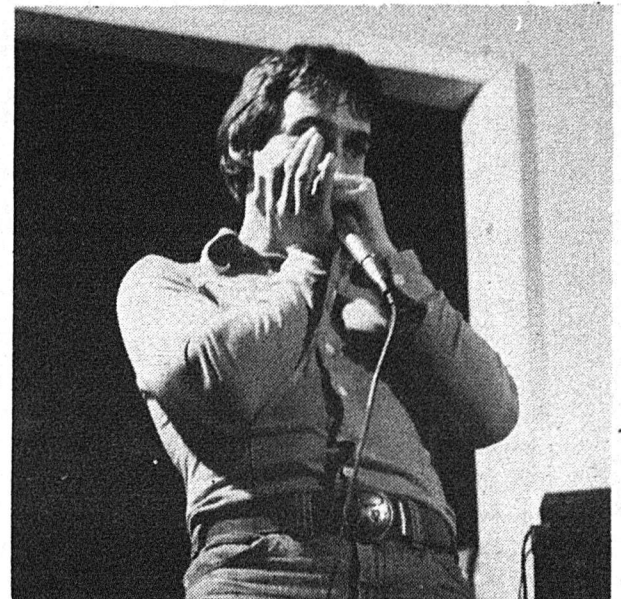
When coming back in early '75 Pontiac has had to solve some problems you have when you try to be a local band that plays blues. Booking agencies were pretty hard to get in the ass. They "offered no encouragement," Linedrive and Chris agree. "they wanted us to be names, scene, sound...they didn't expect us to be a band." Pontiac has lasted better than two years in Vancouver. They do their own bookings.

Pontiac has been getting better the whole time they've been together. Linedrive just got himself a new guitar and that helps him along. He listens to Magic Johnson, Elmo James, Muddy Waters, Otis Rush and lots of other cats and puts down that kind of thing with a lot of power. He can play slide guitar alright but he can't play pre-rock-and-roll raunchy chords and driving



Rob sings too — that's Rob Storeshaw the harp man. His singing is lower down than either Ron's or Linedrive's and a lot of times you'll hear the blues sung high like they do. Rob's got a strong Mississippi inflection he uses though and his singing works out good. His harp playing works out good off and on, but he seems to have slumps that hold him back sometimes. He's blowin' more chromatic these days and when he cuts loose with that thing it's often better than his Marine Band work.

Linedrive and the boys don't play blues all the time. The songs they do blues or not "reflect personality." There's a consistency about Pontiac which some people get down on but there's something you can say for it too. You can't tell the difference between a song that say, Ron wrote, from a song they do of somebody else's. That's as far as the feeling and the essence of what's going on goes because the lyrics and rhythm and stuff are all going to be different.



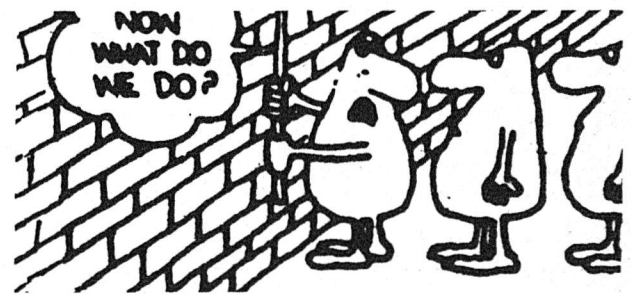
lines that he really works out on. (He gets bad on that stuff!) He also listens to what's goin on and puts in the right thing at the time.

Chris does that too. He's the drummer and he must've listened to a lot of Fred Below cause he puts down his be-bop blues, like Below was with Little Walter, right fierce. He's got some of the funkier drums you'd ever want to see. He has himself a set of those 1935 Slingerland Radio Kings and those are just the thing for that kind of thing.

You got to watch him sometime cause he drums a kind of weird-like. He told me once "I don't know anything about music." I can remember that, it was at the Executive Tavern in '76. That's probably true 'cause I think he wouldn't lie. The thing Chris knows about is keepin' the ride going real strong and steady like a cross between a clock and a train.

Ron works with him on that. He's the bassist and he don't do much fancy stuff but he knows the thing he wants to do and he does that thing. He does a lot of singing and so does Lionel. They can both sing but Ron can sure sound raunchy. He's one of the best singers I know about.

Linedrive says "we're not duplicating machines...we're not exclusively blues...we're not going to spend thirty-five years and end up being Muddy Waters." And if you consider that and the fact that there is a consistency of approach there, and that the approach is "faithful to the blues" you end up with a band that's playin what they feel and that's real.



## Stonepicker reveals harsh reality

by Dave Samuel

George Ryga, *Ballad of a Stonepicker* (Talon Books, Vancouver 1976) 142 pp. 2.95 paperback.

*Ballad of a Stonepicker* includes a figure scarcely encountered in recent Canadian prairie fiction, the "dirt farmer." In unfolding *Ballad of a Stonepicker* Ryga reveals a fact seemingly unknown to such writers as, for instance, Robert Kroetch: farming involves a great deal of back-breaking labour and farm life is centred around this labour. Ryga tells a series of stories using the persona of farmer who has grown-up in a mixed-farming area in the forties and early fifties. Each anecdote is only loosely connected to the next, but taken together they form a picture of the economic and social life of an entire farm community.

This picture is not a pleasant one. The country people are poorly educated and ill-informed. Their marriages are often dictated by the state of their finances, and their sexual relationships are blighted by a narrow-minded, repressive community. Their bodies are burnt by the sun and wind and gradually deformed by heavy labour. The book is permeated by consciousness of wasted human potential.

*Ballad of a Stonepicker* is an anti-mythological novel. It is based upon the premise that realism in art is

important, that the function of art is not to manufacture mythology but to dispel it. It isn't a pastoral farm world that Ryga has fictionalized but one where people are maimed by farm machinery and where kids are kept out of school because their parents need their help to survive economically. The hired men aren't barnyard philosophers but poor bastards who are worked to exhaustion for a few dollars in wages. Ryga's farmers don't come away from their years on the land with healthy bodies from the outdoor life but rather with hernias and crushed discs.

*Ballad of a Stonepicker* may stand as one of the few literary records of the demise of an entire class of small farmers who weren't amenable to large-scale mechanization or who found the exploitation of their poorer neighbours distasteful. The human waste which has been presented in *Ballad of a Stonepicker* is a by-product of what has been accepted as a normal economic process: the eating-up of the small by the large. The small-farm families of the sort shown in the novel will soon be as scarce as the buffalo. Unfortunately, since their departure doesn't harmonize so nicely with the mythology of the West, it will vanish largely unrecorded by our Canadian authors.