

Native band expresses the joys of being human

by Toussaint Farrell

The Opera House was cosy, inviting, intimate when Kashtin performed there on June 12. The modest crowd was relaxed and spoke in gentle tongues. A soft blue light glowed from the stage and harmonious sounds flowed throughout the hall. You would not have guessed that half of these people had waited in line for over two hours.

Kashtin, an Inuit word for tornado, is made up of Canadian

concert

Kashtin
The Opera House
June 12

Innu singers Florent Volland and Claude Mackenzie.

Originally hailing from the Malotienam Indian reserve north of Sept-Îles, the pair's style has been likened to The Pogues and Bob 'Skippy' Dylan. The band's lyrics, in the Montagnais lan-

guage, weave rock, blues and folk influences.

Liner notes sum up the band's musical sensibilities: "Montagnais language has no equivalent for the word music. To us, music is everywhere; it vibrates through every little thing. Our forefathers sought oneness with nature through sound."

This approach is evident in their music. Tougher pop material like "Tipatshimun" ("The Devil's

Song") and lighter folk material like "Shashish" ("A Long Time Ago") are handled with delicacy and the intensity of the reverent.

The band started its set with the hit "E Uassiuian" ("My Childhood"). The crowd was ecstatic, though in a serene, reflective manner. With husky voices and guitars, the band poeticized such themes as childhood, family, friendship and love.

Wearing their heritage with pride, the band struck a responsive chord.

At one memorable point in the concert, Volland sat upstage with his acoustic guitar singing Bob Dylan's "The Times They Are A'Changin'." Backed by a wicked bass, this hearty rendition was met with enthused faces.

Discovered by a Quebec producer in 1989, the band has since opened up for The Gypsy Kings; their album reached the 100,000 sales mark in three months in a relatively restricted market.

Apparently they are popular in Europe, where they have been described as "modern" and "exciting." They have been very lucky, and this is not to be taken lightly.

Interviews with the duo, have dealt predictably with the issue of their Amerindian descent. The more articulate spokesperson for the group, Volland, has admitted the political relationship that exists between cultural heritage and identity.

But many interviewers have noted the group's discomfort, even reluctance, when the issue of Oka is raised.

During the intensity of that conflict, few Quebecois were tolerant of "music by Indians." Unfortunately, in light of the presently accepted role of world beat music, the band shies away from this challenge. Kashtin is merely "feel good" music, and we all know where that category fits in when history books are written.

For the band to truly express the heritage of its people, it must not give lip service to vacant yearnings. Kashtin singing about the pain of losing a girlfriend is like a hunted rabbit admiring the beauty of a wolf's jaw. While expressing the simplicity of being human is nice, it can never be of greater importance than acting against the damaging effects of the here-and-now. It is clear that the commercial arena in which the band operates mutes its political role: the comfort level of the listeners cannot be disrupted.

On my way home from the concert, I saw many Native people sleeping on park benches. As ambassadors for Native people, Kashtin seeks to build bridges, not bonfires.

Cynicism and naivete have, in some manner, become bedfellows. Not many people want to admit or even remember the past, but life does continue and we are the inheritors of its mistakes. Hope does have its time and place, and, judging from the audience's reaction, it was here that bridges were built.

Kashtin may not be primed purveyors of justice, but they are lonely delinquents expressing the joys of being human.

New Age — old problems

by Ira Nayman

The New Age movement is an easy target for criticism; it frequently offers simplistic and unworkable solutions to people's problems. Nonetheless, the problems it attempts to solve are the same that mainstream religions address. And to the extent that it is successful in decreasing people's suffering, it deserves to be taken seriously.

New Age music is in the same position. It sometimes seems like little more than background noise and rarely worth listening to more than once. This generalization, like most, doesn't hold up when specific instances are considered.

Dan Gibson spends a lot of time in forests, on lakes and in other natural settings collecting sound effects and since 1981, he

music

Don Gibson and Hennie Bekker
Harmony: Exploring Nature with Music
Dan Gibson Productions

The Karmavores
The Karmavores
some local label

has produced 15 natural sound albums.

While interesting, those albums were not art. It took the addition of Hennie Bekker's synthesizer to make Gibson's work worthy of critical consideration.

Harmony: Exploring Nature With Music is the first major collaboration between the two men. While the combination of natural sounds and electronic music might at first seem bizarre, it is effective.

Each song successfully evokes a different mood (from the trickling of "Stream of Dreams" to the solitude of "Arctic Life" to the majesty of "Timberwolves"). And for the most part, the music complements, rather than detracts from, the natural sounds.

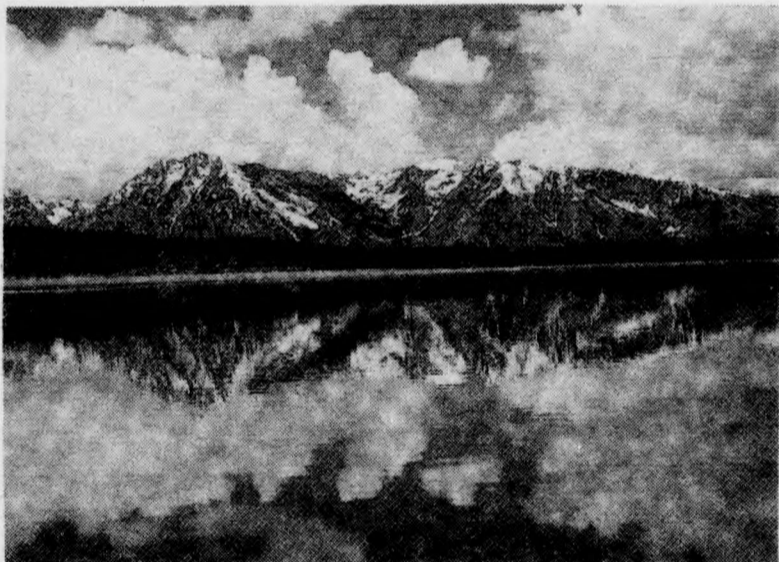
The final song, "Wilderness Lost," adds spoken word narrative to the mix. It is a good idea: the story, about a defoliated world in the year 2040, where life cannot exist outside environmentally secure buildings, thematically ties the album together. Unfortunately it isn't well written, which undercuts the importance of what is being said.

Like other new age music, *Harmony* can be used as background, however, its message that humanity must learn to coexist with nature, also makes it a profound and moving work.

The same cannot be said for The Karmavores' self-titled album. The music is pleasant enough pop, but not memorable.

The lyrics are trite to the point of offense, offering pat solutions to complex problems. "Don't tell me keep out the blacks," Eliot N, the band's leader, sings, "The Jews the gays and about Commie attacks/Don't tell me keep out the Whites/Or that there's gonna be some fights/All I want is for us to be free/If you could come and sing this song with me."

They've identified some problems; when they are able to offer something more than joining them in song, I'll consider listening.



The album cover says it all

by Bruce Adamson

An extremely jaded critic from the *Toronto Star* once said he had mastered the art of reviewing albums simply by looking at their covers. I was shocked and amazed: what a confession!

Upon receiving my copy of Icky Joey's *Pooh* (it's an album, silly!), I decided to let the album cover influence my aural investigation.

Imagine, if you will, a young man of 25. He looks a heck of a lot like Adam Horowitz. He also looks like a fraternity brother. His

music

Icky Joey
Pooh
C/Z Records

eyes are clamped shut, his lips are sealed tight, and his Dizzy Gillespie-sized cheeks are filled to the brim with an unidentifiable substance. I hope the photographer had his birkenstocks strapped on tightly because it looks like his subject is about to achieve technicolour yawn meltdown. John Belushi goes punk?

On to the backsleeve: "Dog

Lady," "Fat," "Smokin' the Devil's Bud," "Medusa Anus Eye," "I'm Liberace Now." Uh, oh! I smell crazed college kids wreaking havoc in a cheesy recording studio somewhere in Washington state. Animal House moshomania?

Daytona Beach frat-rock? I could easily have stopped at this point; however, after diagnosing myself as unjaded I pressed on, intending to compare my cover observations with the tunes inside. To my utter amazement, I discovered a perfect match.

It was too good to be true! The barely competent garage band with the professional underdog front man was going for it!

"Going for what?" you ask. Why, the throat of course.

Rich kids, fat women, pot smokers and Liberace are needed mercilessly on this platter, to the sound of out-of-tune guitars and relentless yelling and screaming. Clearly vocalist David Lipe is out for the Don Rickles-meets-Johnny Rotten award.

If you are the sensitive type, stay away. Actually most people will stay away because the music, like the humour, is of questionable taste.

What gets my goat is that the theory espoused by my buddy at the *Star* has some merit. Sure, you can judge a book by its cover—but an album?



Florent Volland and Claude Mackenzie of the Native group Kashtin. The music is pleasant enough, but it doesn't address Native issues.

Problems with the Godster

by Bruce Adamson

These punters don't believe in the big guy.

"Who?" I hear you ask.

You know—the big guy! The man upstairs, the Godster. No siree, they just don't believe. And if you've got 40 minutes to burn (sorry . . .) they'll tell you. Over and over and over.

Aside from the lyrical one-track-mindedness, *Heathen* have a lot of potential as an independent band. The musicianship is good and the performances are solid.

Vocalist David White-Godfrey's style is well rooted in Ronnie James Dio and Bruce Dickinson. These influences come to the fore in power ballads like "Prisoner of Fate" and *Heathen's* cover of the Rainbow classic "Kill the King."

Guitarists Lee Altus and Doug Piercy likewise take their cue from Euro-metal greats like Tony Iommi, Glenn Tipton and Michael Schenker, tossing out licks and harmonized melodic lines with blast furnace intensity.

music

Heathen
Victims of Deception
Roadrunner/Cargo Records

The sad thing is that for all of their potential, *Heathen* is a junior A thrash band. Instead of trying to break new ground, the quartet seems content to do what most young metal bands are doing these days—ripping off Metallica. The guitar sounds are so similar that Kirk Hammett should be suing for unpaid royalties. The same applies to the drums.

Indeed, the riffing, writing and arranging are so spot on that if someone told me Bruce Dickinson joined Metallica and threw together this album, I'd believe them.

Bands like Metallica, King's X and Guns & Roses are great because they have combined various influences with an irrepressible personal style. *Heathen*, like so many others in similar circumstances, have decided to take the easy route—too bad it leads to the delete bin.

One for the (open) road

by Frank Marlingola

On 13 Engines' new album, *A Blur To Me Now*, sweet honey strings float in the musical lulls, complementing the clang of the ride cymbal. It is a very sixties sound.

Loose ride cymbals interweave with the guitars, each bouncing off the other. The vocals have a country sound.

The drummer is talented. Although his rolls occur too frequently and are too long, they don't give the album a sluggish feel. He gives the snare and bass drum a perfect lull before steering the it out of the abyss to give off a toe-tapping equilibrium that even the most cow-heavy drunk will

music

13 Engines
A Blur To Me Now
Capital Records

enjoy keeping time to.

As the acolyte-owner of a fully restored black cherry 1942 Harley, the song "Throttle Open Wide" strikes a familiar chord.

The architects of this song knew their subject well; you can almost feel the twilight ethereal experience of riding on open road.

Get this recording, if not for the all-encompassing wall of guitars sound, then for the car's tapedeck for those easy rides on open country roads.