

By RICK JANSON

Nice is a strange word. It is tempting to use it in a derogatory fashion, its ordinariness taking away from any compliment the word may have originally tried to bestow. But nice is the word that springs to mind when summing up the four individuals that make up the Canadian pop band, The Spoons.

They are very much nice people. Not in the derogatory sense, but in describing the unpretentious affable nature of the four. How else can you describe a band that sends birthday cards out to members of its fan club?

After three successive albums that have seen the band grow both in popularity and creativity, The Spoons remain four kids from Burlington who like to make music and have fun.

Herded into a hotel room by their tour manager, it is too easy to try and assign characteristics to them in a short period of time.

On lead vocals and guitar, Gordon Deppe sits upright in his chair and takes on a kind of leadership role. Keyboardist Rob Preuss on the other hand follows the dialogue like one would follow the spaceships on a video game—attentively but silent. Sandy Horne, on bass and vocals, approaches the interview shyly at first, but contributes more as the dialogue proceeds. Drummer Derrick Ross punctuates many of Deppe's statements with an aura of confidence.

After debating who is going to tell the story for the one-thousandth time, Ross is picked to describe how the band came to be named after a piece of cutlery.

"Gordon and our first keyboardist were at the time eating alphabet soup with spoons and I guess they were looking for a name at the time that didn't give any sort of meaning to the music," says Ross.

"People don't know what to expect out of a name like The Spoons," finishes Deppe. "At the time we were very much into the suburbia kind of thing, like *Stick Figure Neighbourhood* (their first album)—two cars, a kid, spoons and cutlery."

Deppe grew up listening to bands like Genesis, Vandergraft Generator and the Strawbs, and was determined to create a band with a decidedly progressive sound to it. Along the way they picked up a variety of influences, including that of Culture Club whom they toured with in 1983.

"Every band we played with we picked-up something," says Deppe. "With them it was mainstream music. Before them I was into artsey stuff—very progressive music. Watching them I really learned to admire mainstream music. It was fun."

"And we don't do (Van Halen's) *Jump* in our set," adds Ross in jest.

The band likes to tout the fact that they have taken a very individual approach to their music when they could have taken a much more commercial route to success.

"We're the people who are taking the risks, other people aren't," says Deppe.

Part of that risk includes bringing in a small brass section to play with the band.

"Anything that comes in to change our music doesn't change it that much," he says.

The brass section punctuates their new single "Tell No Lies," giving it a very slight sense of funk.

In addition to putting out the new single, Deppe and Horne have recently completed a feature film call *Listen to the City*, directed by Canadian film-maker Ron Mann.

"It's really a weird film," says Deppe. "Sandy has a really big acting part in it. I just happened to go along to the audition, to see the guy. I brought along a cassette because the guy liked the song Sandy used to audition with."

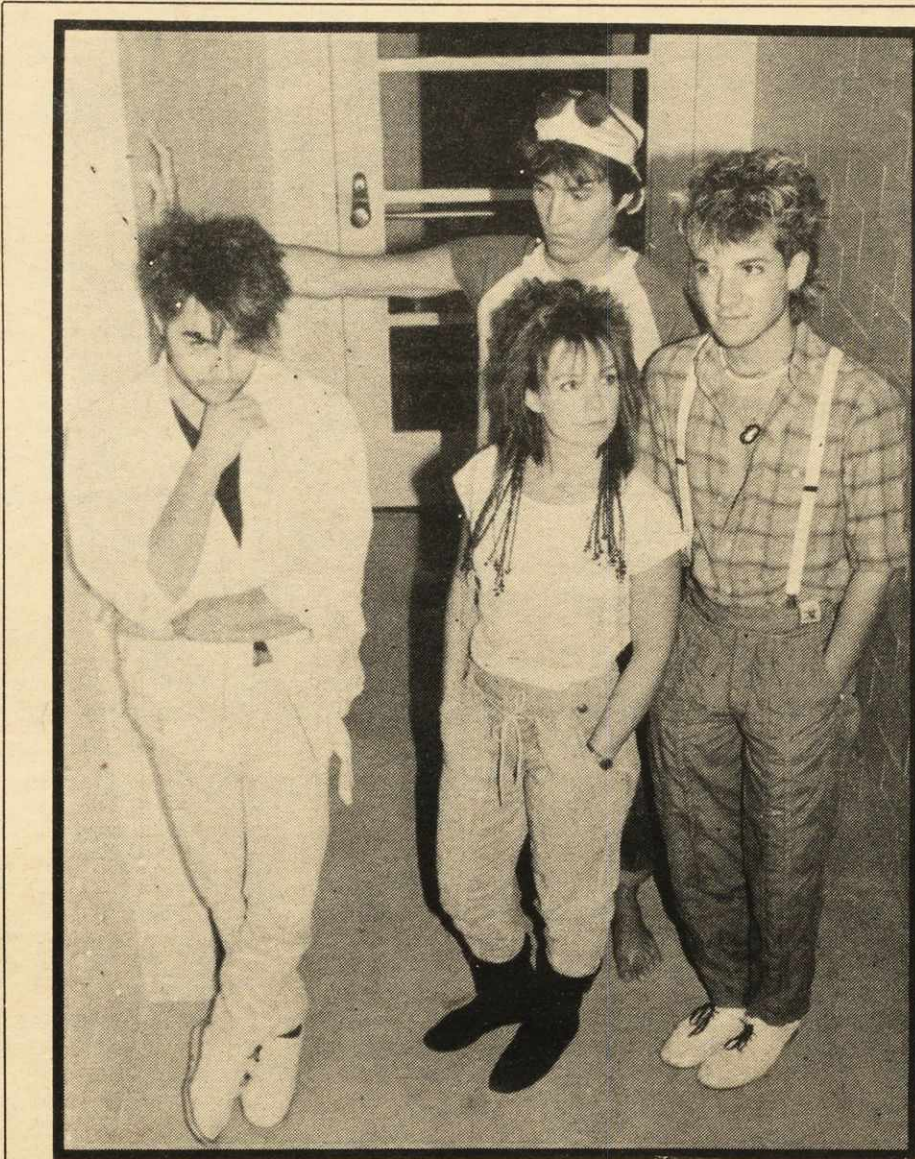


Photo: Peter Katsiitis, Dal Photo

The Spoons

Nice kids making nice music in a nice town

Mann asked Deppe what other music he had, and soon he was doing the soundtrack to the movie.

"The film was written by a philosophy professor," he explains. "It's about unemployment—about how the closing of this factory affects this whole city. Sandy's Dad (in the film) loses his job and she's got to play these dingy little clubs. She meets Jim Carroll—he's a poet/musician from New York—and he plays a guy who comes out of a coma after 20 years and roams the streets and meets Sandy."

Deppe describes most of the music he has written for the movie as ambient music.

"It was great—he let me do stuff I ordinarily wouldn't do with The Spoons."

Despite the film and the recently completed video for "Tell No Lies," Deppe says the visual work has not influenced his song writing.

"Until the last video I hated making videos. The last one ("Tell No Lies") was so much fun. I'm really looking forward to the next one. "Old Emotions" and "Nova Heart" were pretty serious—even the filming was pretty serious.

"They had to have some kind of dark meaning behind them, whereas "Tell No Lies" was totally opposite—we got to goof around and be idiots and stuff."

"We just had fun doing the video and it shows. (In the other videos) we had to worry too much about acting. This time we were allowed to be ourselves and it worked out perfectly."

The new video depicts the band flying home from South America on a DC-3 and dealing with the fear of going through customs—a fear everybody has "whether you're guilty or not."

Thrown on to a set with "lots of llamas, goats, chickens and 30 extras all dressed up," the band was allowed to improvise and contribute to the creative process.

Horne says videos have become an important part of any band's repertoire.

"You can't afford not to make videos "when everyone's out there doing them. They've become essential for every song. If you want to get within the top ten you've got to have a video," she says.

"The video sells the song—it's another means of advertising," says Ross.

Deppe says that when the band toured with Culture Club, they were known more for their videos than anything else.

"That video ("Old Emotions") did a lot for us down there (in the U.S.) when our album wasn't getting distribution. It's like our calling card."

"It's sad," says Deppe. "There's a lot of songs that will get lost because they're not properly represented on the video shows."

Deppe says he likes to write his songs based on observations about people. He has a B.A. in psychology, which he says may come through "a little bit."

The band acknowledges that their lyrics are apolitical compared to such performers as The Clash, Frankie Goes to Hollywood and The Sex Pistols.

"They play a good part, but we could never do that—I couldn't because I don't know enough about all that. I'm glad someone is doing it," says Deppe.

"In Canada what are we going to do?" asks Ross, saying, "we're having problems with Mulroney? In Ireland they have problems, they have unrest that they see every day. They bomb the shit out of each other. They're from that part of the world where it's happening—we just see it on TV."

"What I think comes through in everybody's lyrics," says Deppe, "is that general underlying fear everybody's got of what's going to happen. That's why you've got all these neurotic and introverted lyrics. It sure is affecting everybody."

The band is very sensitive to being labelled a "bubblegum" act—a description that attached itself to the group after a two-night stand in the Ontario Place Forum in Toronto.

The two shows were attended by 25,000 people, mostly between the ages of 13-17.

The bubblegum image came about at those shows "because of the venue—that's where young people go," says Deppe. "That's only part of our image. We're part-time teen idols."

The band faces the challenge of following up their highly successful *Talkback* album, which spawned three hits in Canada—"Old Emotions," "The Rhythm" and "Talkback."

"You have to be careful," says Deppe. "You want to develop and change a hit, but you don't want to change too much and freak-out your fans."

The Spoons are proud of their steadily growing audience.

"You don't get a following unless you've had two or three consistently good records," says Ross. "People don't stay by you as much as they did before. You go up and down in this business a lot faster."

"The other thing is that we haven't been one-hit wonders," says Horne. "Every album so far has been a stepping stone. It gives us a chance to develop."

After three albums, videos and motion pictures, the band is happy growing creatively together.

"A lot of bands break-up when they get into the big egos," says Deppe. "We never got into that. Besides, when we tour we get separate rooms, separate floors ... that takes care of that."

"Maybe when we start earning millions of dollars we'll start killing each other and drinking," says Ross. "You got to enjoy doing it (performing)—it beats selling shoes."

A touch of nationalism comes through when the band talks about their contribution to popular culture.

"I think we're valid," says Deppe. "I don't think we're just entertainment or a bar band—I think we're helping to further the movement of music a little bit—we're doing our bit for this country."

"We're nowhere near the tip of the wave, but we're in there somewhere—perhaps in the crest—concerned with moving things along rather than doing the tested and true stuff. It's sort of a mission for me—showing that some valid stuff can come out of Canada."

They worry that current Canadian content rules for radio stations may actually be hurting indigenous talent rather than aiding it.

"At the very beginning it's essential because a lot of Canadian radio stations won't recognize Canadian bands when they're brand new," says Horne. "But when "Arias and Symphonies" came out a certain radio station said they wouldn't play it because they were already playing 30 per cent CANCON. It works at the beginning, but at the same time it can work against you. It's a 50-50 thing."

"Most radio stations are now playing way over the percentage," says Ross, "so they should get rid of it."

The Spoons will be playing the *Misty Moon* on Barrington Street for the remainder of this week. □