

The Frantics get down to serious matters

Walking upright

by H.A. Hutchinson

The Frantics "walked upright" and the audience was on the floor. That "zany" comedy group began a whirl-wind tour of Canada last Wednesday night right here in Halifax at the Rebecca Cohn. **The Frantics Walk Upright: A Journey Through History** answered those mysteries left unanswered by religion, science, and Trivial Pursuit. The boys, Paul Chato, Rick Green, Dan Redican and Peter Wildman, delved into our murky pasts and got covered in murk. The journey took us from the formation of the earth and outlying suburbs, to the first bits of gooey slime bumping together and forming life, to the early grunts of (wo)mankind, through the many civilizations that thought they were so great, right up to the twentieth century. It was the most historically accurate production since *Cats*.

Did you know that the earth was created when God sneezed... that Vikings wore spatulas on their belts... that Joan of Arc was tried and convicted on People's Court... or that the Declaration of Independence contained a clause providing for "No Tea Tax"? Neither did the audience.

The group itself oozed out of the "murk" of Toronto, Ontario, where they played to audiences which had a penchant for smashing Volkswagens on stage for 50¢. Frat parties and CBC Radio shows supplemented their income. Then came their CBC Television debut — **The Frantics: 4 on the Floor**. It spawned such characters as Mr. Canoehead and Marvin (the star-nosed) Mole, who were seen by Canadians and, amazingly enough, by Americans on Showtime/The Movie Channel. Now, the Frantics are taking their version of history on a Canada-wide tour... and they started in this town.

A candid interview with Rick Green (alias Adam/Attila the Hun/Thomas Jefferson/Engels/Hitler) revealed the group's more serious side. He discussed the Frantics' beginnings and attributed their name to a screw-up at the El Mocambo (a seedy club in T.O. that's usually referred to as "The Famed El Mocambo" because the Rolling Stones once played there). So, the Schizofrantics became the Frantics, and, as Rick says, "It kind of captures what we do. It's a little manic, a little dangerous, a little panicky..." But even the most

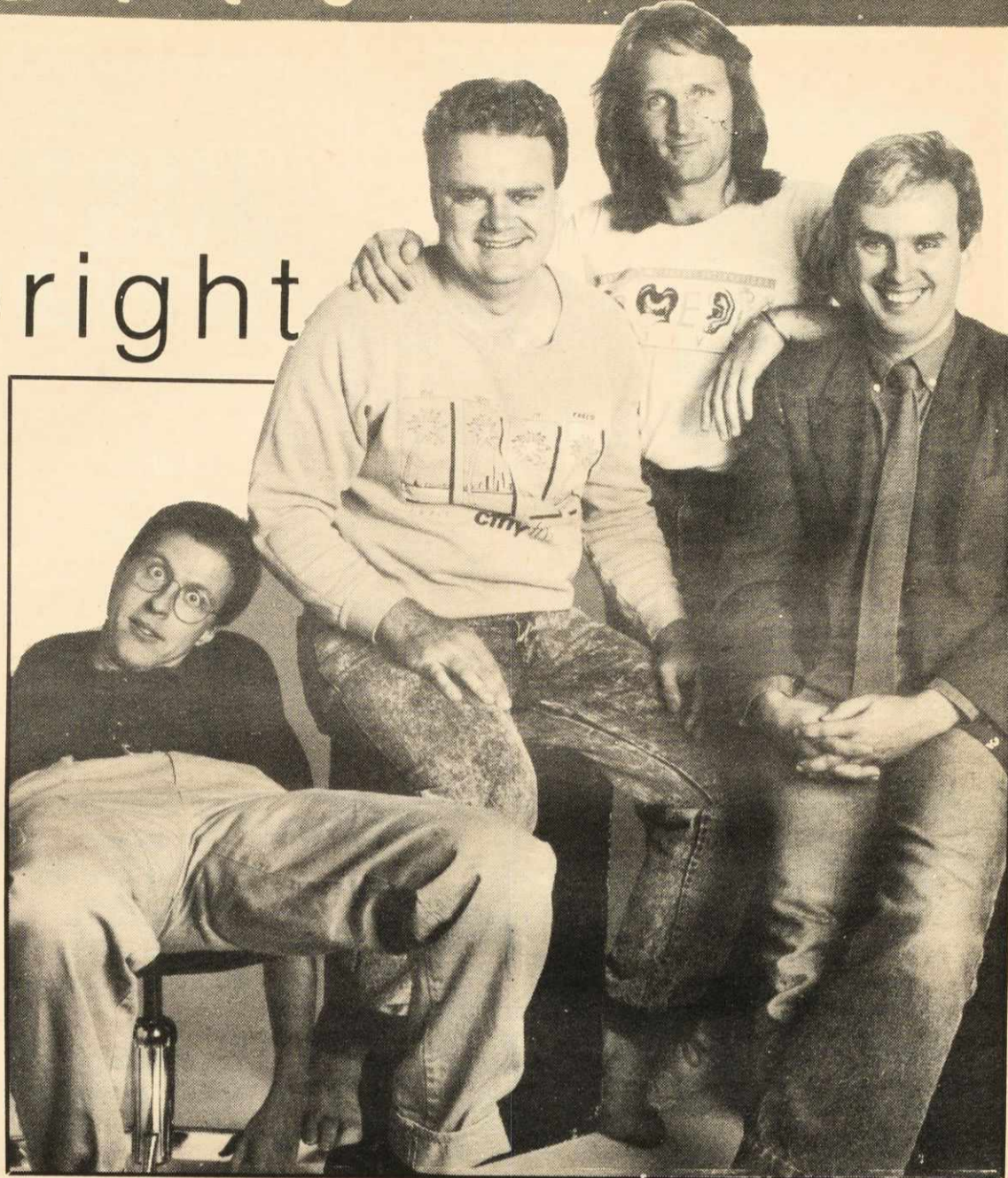
outrageous endeavour requires a rational approach.

Gazette: From where do you derive your inspiration for this show?

Rick Green: The bottom line was trying stuff that was really creative and interesting for us and with four people contributing, you have four styles. There's a different contribution from each person and it changes from time to time. It ends up being a marriage in a way because you end up finishing each other's sentences, completing each other's thoughts. And that's what this show has. There's lots of thinking and talking and chatting and ideas poured into it. What we've got is, I think, some of the best stuff we've done in quite a while, maybe ever, I don't know. It's four hands all painting with the same brush and they're guiding it, hopefully in slightly different directions, or something or else a lot of paint smeared all over. (laughs)

Sometimes the ideas bounce off each other, talking about things. For this show there was a lot of discussion about things such as... Did you know that there were actually three Popes at one point? No, I didn't know that. Did you know that the Pope used to have mistresses? No, I didn't. Did you know that the Popes used to murder each other? What? It was very educational in a lot of ways because you'd read these things and you came away with this feeling that until this century, the world has been a pretty nasty place to live in. I think it's better now: you've got twenty-seven million Canadians living in relative harmony (I forget how many nationalities) and then you have some place like Beirut where you have three or four different religions and they're killing each other for it. The fact that there's five billion people in the world now may make it seem like it's a much more violent place but the average age is seventy — not in half but in a good portion of the world. That just wasn't true a good thousand years ago. Then it was the top one per cent and everybody else lived in filth and died in filth and didn't know what things were and were willing to believe anything they were told. I have great optimism for today.

This show, even though it's set in a historical context, really does address a lot of very modern ills. I mean, there's Attila the Hun, who's worried about



The four zany guys: Paul Chato, Dan Redican, Peter Wildman and Rick Green.
4. Mike Oldfield

whether or not he has bad breath. The same goes for the religious and political satire we've included in the show. The four of us are kind of mischievous on stage and people come up afterwards and say, "That was awful, but God I was laughing so hard. I couldn't believe you said that," or, "Oh, so nasty. I thought it was wonderful." One older lady said what we did was "deliciously dangerous". You know, that's a real compliment. A priest came up after a show once and said, "You know, your religious material was spot-on. It is so right and so true", because it is. The skits are based on, in this show anyway, the Crusades and the Inquisition and Joan of Arc and all of these things that the sort of modern religion is kind of embarrassed about. There's rather a supposition that somehow God decreed organized religion rather than churches. In England they're vicious with religious satire. It's just amazing. And when you think about it, a lot of people over there, like Dave Allen, just go after anybody. And Monty Python and that tradition — I think we enjoy that. Partly, I think, because we all have had a large or at least some amount of church-going when we were little and all four of us are all different religions. I

mean, we range from Jewish to Catholic, United Church, and so on. So there's a range in there of thoughts and viewpoints. I guess that comes through in the work, too.

G: Do you think that your historical humour has some greater significance?

RG: When you have the ability to make jokes, somehow you have the ability to take reality apart and to put it back together. When you can do that, you stop accepting the belief that there's one true reality or one true answer to each question. Maybe there is one answer, but you're not necessarily convinced that you have it. It's a case of rejecting extremes. One of the songs in the show is called "Here Come the Christians" and it's about the Crusades, and it points out the fact that, you know, Jesus came down to earth and said "Blessed are the Peacemakers" and the Ten Commandments said "Thou Shalt Not Kill" and Jesus said "Love Thine Enemies" and so on and then these people killed in the name of Christ. They're tearing apart Beirut and Ireland now for the same reason. How does somebody's message get so convoluted?

G: So that's how you convey it, through laughter?

RG: I think that one of the

strongest things is laughter because if you laugh, that's something that someone like a Hitler would fear. It just means you're not taking them seriously. No matter what reaction, whether it's awe or fear, that's what they want: but they don't want laughter. The minute people started laughing at Joe Clark, he didn't have a chance any more and the same with Gerald Ford. When they did — BANG — Cater got in. So I think that laughter has an incredible value. It's a lot of fun to get people laughing, and I know that we've actually induced a couple of births over the years because laughter is an incredible relaxant. Partly because all the muscles are going and also because you're sucking in so much oxygen doing it. In fact, the women have gone home so relaxed that the labour started that night within two or three hours after they had left the theatre. So, we've induced two or three babies over the years, which is really kind of neat.

G: Who else comes to see you?

RG: I think that the audience that we attract is, I don't know if you'd call it "cult", but there are people who don't "get" what we're doing and then there are people who know us quite well.

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