

Minimalist funk touches down in Edmonton

by Melanie Klimchuk

The Animal Slaves were let loose at Scandals last Wednesday night. Elizabeth Fischer, Roscoe Hales, and Rachel Melas were making a stop on a tour that will include New York, Toronto, and Montreal.

The Vancouver band is "different." You can't classify their music in conventional terms; calling them 'punk' would be too easy. Minimalist, primal Funk is more like it.

Lead vocalist Fischer sounds like Tina Turner before she started smoking — underwater. Her right hand controls the keyboard; the left curls clawlike beneath her breast. She has hair like a stylish Orangutang.

Fischer has been a painter, a wanderer, and an artist since she left Hungary at fourteen years old. Three of her six languages, she says, have gotten rusty. But it was only recently, within the last five or six years, that she felt she could express herself artistically, emotionally in English.

"It was like it just clicked," she says. "I'd sit down and write a few verses. Then I'd read it and say 'This is not pretty'. It was intense, ugly stuff."

Her writing prompted her interest in communicating on stage what she had written. "I realized that what most people felt today was not being represented in what I heard." So she created the Animal Slaves. "I've always been musical," she says. She is thirty-seven.

She smiles. "And I hope to get older. I feel I'm still developing as an artist."

"What would you say," I ask, thinking of something my mother might say, "if someone called you a degenerate, if they said what you did on stage signifies the end of civilization as we know it?"

"I'm not a degenerate!" She seems amused. "What I do onstage is me. It's what all of us are inside. That's what I want people to see."

What you see up there is basic, unrefined, raw humanity. "Sometimes," she says, "it's the ugliest part of myself."

I see what she means in their song, "Scratching Hives": "I give you my madness, partake of it freely . . . I amuse the allergic by scratching my hives."

Her term "Animal Slaves" (roughly para-

phrased) signifies the basic animal nature that enslaves people until they recognize it in themselves.

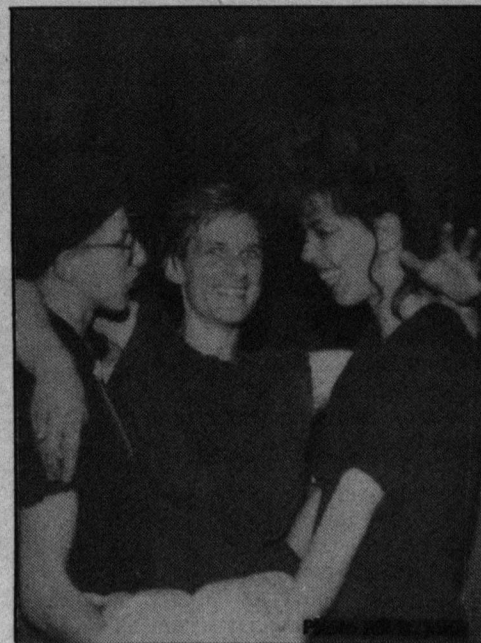
The credo is hers. She writes all the lyrics. But the music itself is "what happens when we get together and jam," Fischer says.

"It's just us, expressing ourselves," says Rachel Melas, bass player. She hops around like a small bird when I try to talk to her. In a recent CJSR interview, she described herself as "the best Jewish lesbian bass player on West Broadway."

Drummer Roscoe Hales seems strangely sweet, sincere, and enthusiastic for a band with edges as rough as the Animal Slaves. Not that the band isn't tight — they are. But he's still happy to talk to us at 1:30 am. Elizabeth, who's been holding the elevator, storms in.

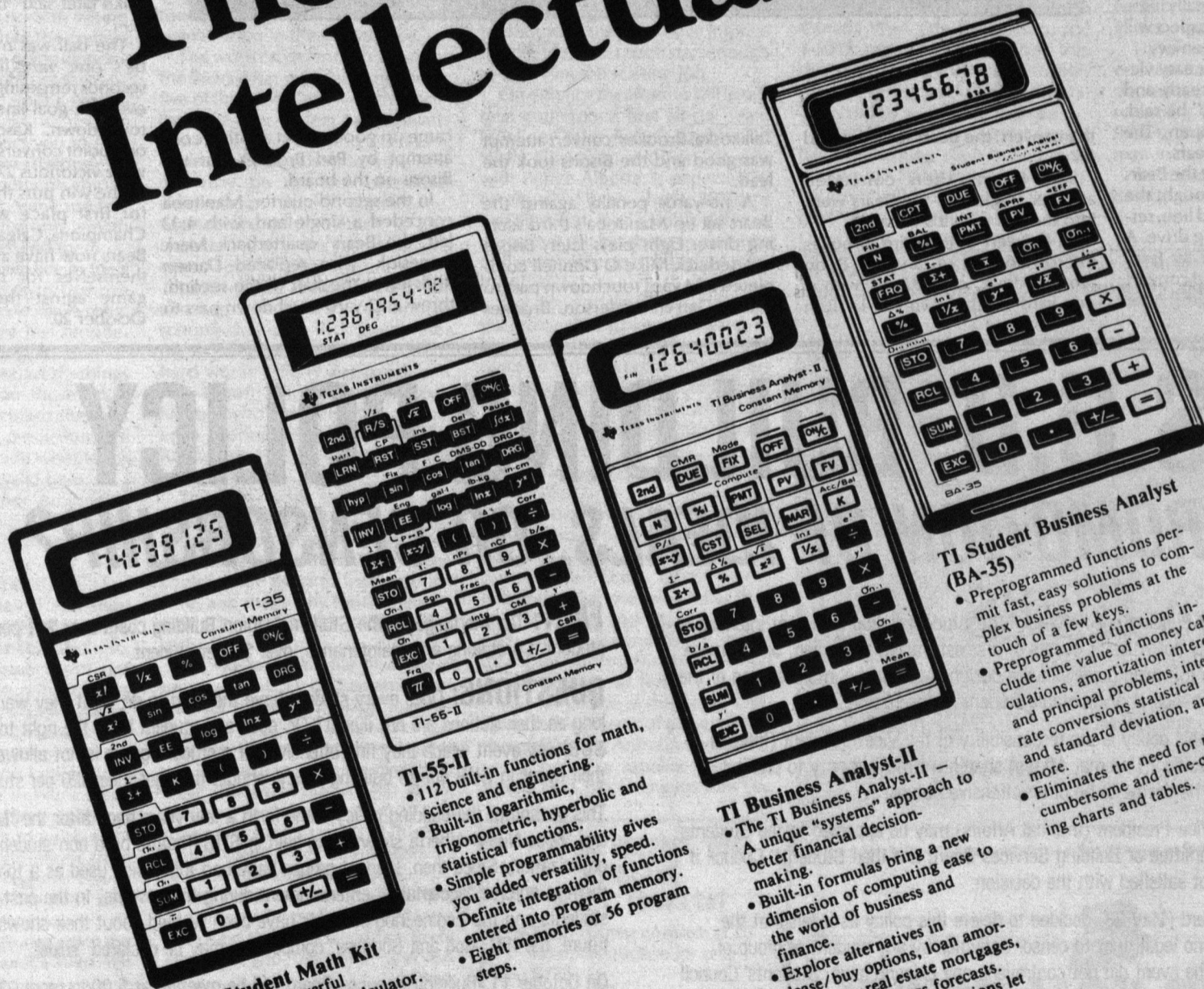
"Good-night, Roscoe." She gives up, throwing her hands in the air. He's not ready to leave.

The Animal Slaves appear on two Mo-Da-Mu records: *Things Are Still Coming Ashore*, with "54-40" and "Junco run," and on *Animal Slaves*. They have recently made their own video.



Animal Slaves let loose

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