

# Profile of a surf poet

BY ANDREW SIMPSON

Lesley Choyce is busy. His band, Lesley Choyce and the Surf Poets, celebrated the release of their debut CD last weekend. And when Choyce and the Surf Poets aren't performing or recording their unusual combination of spoken word and music, Choyce distracts himself with a dizzying array of projects and pastimes.

As a part-time professor at Dalhousie, Choyce teaches in the English Department and Transition Year Program.

He is the author of 43 published books ranging from poetry and literature to young adult fiction. And as owner and operator of the Pottersfield Press — a small publishing company located in Lawrencetown Beach, Nova Scotia — he oversees the publishing of numerous other works.

Beyond music and books and classrooms, Choyce's tentacles reach into the intellectual vacuum of television, where he interviews authors on his show, *Choyce Words*, broadcast nationally on Vision Television.

You may also find Choyce floating offshore at Lawrencetown Beach. He is an avid surfer and one of a rare breed who prefer icy Northern waters to the warm surf of Baha. He is a one-time victor in the Canadian National Surfing Championships, but insists that

surfing is primarily an art.

Today, because of March Break, Choyce has brought his daughter to work at Dalhousie.

"She likes sitting in on university classes because students are allowed to write on the desks and chew gum," jokes Choyce as we walk through the English Department in search of coffee.

Back in Choyce's comfortably cluttered office, we settle in for a brief interview while his daughter examines her new Spice Girls CD. Choyce rolls his eyes comically, "I guess we'll be hearing that one around the house for a while."

Apparently musical taste is not hereditary.

A thin, middle-aged man with a mop of teenage hair, Choyce looks like an aging rocker, but playing with the Surf Poets is a relatively recent development.

"I'm more of a writer than a performer...I used to play in a band when I was in high school called the White Belts," says Choyce with a wry smile. "That was in about 1965-66, outside South Philadelphia."

Choyce was born in New Jersey, but emigrated to Canada 18 years ago. He has embraced his surrogate homeland, and references to Halifax and Nova Scotia are prevalent throughout the Surf Poets' poetry/lyrics.

"People are so often writing about other places, like LA,"

Choyce says, "but I think it's neat to focus on something that's close to home. But not doing it just for the local audience, but so that maybe somebody somewhere else will hear it and think, 'Well isn't that interesting.' And suddenly, there's a little myth created about that place."

"By being specific about places it's kinda saying to the world that, yes, this place is as interesting or more interesting than all the other places, and I'm saying that this is my place, and it's a spectacular, interesting place."

The Surf Poets' new CD, *Long Lost Planet*, is an eclectic musical collage. Each song sets a mood for Choyce's dense, stream-of-consciousness poetry.

"We're all kind of old guys and our reference points go all the way back to the 60s," says Choyce of the music. "It's all there in our heads and we take from it and borrow from it and try to create something that's somewhat original, without being original just to be different, but to actually have some content."

The Surf Poets are realistic with their expectations says Choyce.

"I think we're always going to have a small audience," he says, "but those are the people we really care about. We're not going to do something because of somebody else's motivation, like a big



record company. I think, because we're older, there's not that need to be *big time*. We know what we're doing and why we're doing it and the fun, the joy is in the process. Anything else is just gravy."

By packaging poetry in music, Choyce has found a refreshing way to deliver an old art form. He believes the huge success of rap music has opened up the idea of speaking in music, but he's careful not to sound pretentious.

"Rap is not what I do," says Choyce. "It's not a real natural thing for me to do. And I think if I got into that, it'd be a kind of copycat thing to fit into that mode, but at the same time I sort of ap-

preciate what rap music did."

No matter what kind of music Lesley Choyce plays, he will continue to play it — regardless of whether it gets noticed — and he will continue to be busy.

"I'm happier when I'm productive and creating things," says Choyce. "It'll probably kill me one day. But in the meantime, it's about having a tremendous amount of fun and joy in the creativity of things, and that's something I don't think everybody allows themselves."

*Long Lost Planet is available in book and music stores throughout Halifax.*

## In-flight entertainment with Air Indisa

BY TANIA TREPANIER AND FARHAD DASTUR

"Welcome to Air Indisa Flight 1997, destination: India."

This was the theme for this year's Indian Students Association (INDISA) Night. It was a cultural journey into a pastiche of dramatic Bharata Natyam dance, evocative vocal-mimicking tabla music, comedic acts, a colourful fashion show and culinary delights — held together with admirable verve and vivacity.

Unfortunately, Flight 1997 took-off 30 minutes late; the in-flight movie, "Mission: Implausible" became "Mission: Inaudible" due to sound system difficulties; the anti-collision strobe lights caused a few collisions; and the turbulence encountered on the way unsettled more than a few passengers.

The Bhangra folk dances were all wonderful to watch, and one couldn't help wanting to participate. Traditional Bhangra is a folk dance from the state of Punjab; the New Bhangra, which has gained popularity in the West (clubs in Toronto and Vancouver have regular "Bhangra" nights), is an eclectic fusion of Western musical influences with the more traditional form. New Bhangra may even be a metaphor for post-independence India...but that's a story for another day.

Perhaps the most outstanding act was the Krishna Sabdam

by Sathysai Murty. Sabdam is traditionally the third dance performed in a Bharata Natyam or classical Indian dance recital. This Sabdam depicted the god of love, Krishna, playing his flute. With an emphasis on hand-gestured narrative, the dancer also depicted a gopi (herdswoman) churning milk into butter, and making herself beautiful as a devotee of Krishna.

When we reached cruising altitude, a delicious in-flight meal was served. The menu included such favourites as Tandoori chicken, Basmati rice pilau, Dhahi Bundi, and curried chick peas. And what Indian meal would be complete without pickles, in this case a spicy mix of mango, carrots, and chilies. The dessert of sweet Ladoos was the perfect end to the tasty treats.

While the organizers' pride in Indian cultural heritage permeated the evening, these two travellers were wary of the promise on the cover of the program, which read: "Be prepared for a majestic journey to the exotic east." The difficulty of representing multiculturalism without reducing it to a showcase of food, fashion, and fancy footwork is one that many ethnic groups face in Canada today. Certainly, multicultural realities should be celebrated, but issues of representation, appropriation, and sensitivity also need to be addressed.

For all of its cultural showcasing, INDISA 1997 actually failed to represent the diversity of Indian artistic, linguistic,



ethnic, religious, culinary and musical multiculturalism. Bhangra, for example, is only one of the many folk dance forms of South Asia; Punjabi is only one of many hundreds of languages and dialects spoken. The complete absence of Buddhist, Zoroastrian, Moslem, Jain, or Christian contributions to Indian culture was conspicuous. The emphasis on Punjabi culture perhaps reflects a Halifax reality, but it does not capture the vastness of Indian cultures.

There is a saying that, "India is not a country but a world." The organizers of next year's celebration might pause to reflect on that saying.

However, as this year's MCs pointed out in their "List of 10 Rules for Determining if You Might be Indian", rule #1 states that the true Indian always cheers for the Asian star. So, despite the glitches and gremlins, these Indophiles, at least, are cheering.

## Halifax shuns Black Cabbage

BY STUART MCMILLAN

The Dave Carmichael Band headlined at the Birdland Cabaret last Friday night before a disappointing crowd.

It strikes me as odd that the only "rock bar" in Halifax would feature this kind of act. Dave and company performed an enjoyable show, but I found it difficult not to ask myself, "Why are these types of bands playing here?" It's probably because Halifax is such a redundant city, with very few venues where groups can play in front of a substantial crowd.

The opening act, Black Cabbage from Guelph, Ontario, reminded me of a unique cross between Alanis Morissette and the Crash Test Dummies. The stage looked very small with all eight musicians trying to find room for themselves. They came on at the very early time of 10:30 p.m., which was extremely odd since the bar was still pretty much empty. I talked to the drummer of Black Cabbage, Sam, after they had played and he was very upset and annoyed that they had been made to come on at such an early time. MuchMusic had even come out to film the band, but were told to come back later on, and Black Cabbage missed a chance at some valuable publicity.

The few people who were in attendance saw a great performance by the band as they made their way through an hour long, eighteen song set. Everybody in the band took turns singing, including two female members, giving the group a dynamic edge. One

minute they sounded like Tracy Chapman and the next like Bono. Their influences come from many different places, due to so many people being in the band, ranging from funk to soul to punk.

Overall, Sam the drummer was not too pleased with how things went. Although he said he enjoyed Halifax and the Maritimes, he also said that it may be a while before Black Cabbage come back to these shores again.

The Dave Carmichael Band took the stage a little after 11:30 p.m. and entertained the growing crowd for an hour and a half. Dave took centre stage slinging his acoustic guitar, appearing happy with the audience before him. But no sooner had the band come on stage, then there was an annoying problem. For the first twenty minutes of Dave's show, there was awful, ear splitting feedback coming from the equipment. It was only when this had been fixed could one sit back and enjoy the performance.

Most of the songs Dave played were off his album *Perspective*, including tracks like "Fly Away", "Runaway Child" and "Leatherface Boy". His style of music is funk/folk, with a superb guitarist who performed some great Eric Clapton-type guitar solos. Every once in a while he would lay his electric guitar down and pluck away at a fiddle for the band's more traditional/celtic-influenced songs. Minus the equipment problems, the band played a good show, with the music inspiring a large group to use the dance floor.