

Skydiggers/Leslie Spit TreeO  
SUB Cafeteria  
20 September 1991  
Review by Luis Cardoso



The Sky Diggers - Jaime Rowan Photo

Since the mid-seventies and the advent of the Canadian music industry as we now know it (that is, a Canadian corporate giant that has developed a symbiotic relationship with our national breweries), mainstream Canadian rock groups have come in clusters of bands that, when they're not outright clones of each other, tend to sound suspiciously similar.

The trend began with rock giants like Triumph, Teaze, and Trooper. In the late seventies came Streethart, Prism, and Saga, to name but a few. The eighties saw the success of Loverboy, Platinum Blonde, Helix, and Atlantic Canada's own Haywire. For nearly two decades these and other bands defined the mainstream Canadian rock sound: hard, but over-produced guitar and synth-oriented rock led by a high-pitched male vocal. (The female version, epitomized by Toronto and the Headpins, had a brief heyday in the early eighties.) Not only did these bands sound alike, they looked alike too; it was often difficult to distinguish one band from another in concert.

This sound had its roots in the international successes of the late-sixties/early-seventies Canadian acts Steppenwolf, April Wine, and Rush. Eager to repeat this success, the Canadian music industry developed a roster of clones, jamming the airwaves and invading hockey rinks throughout the country with tours by these so-called rock giants. What they failed to recognize was that Steppenwolf, April Wine, and Rush were actual innovators that deserved their international status.

The industry's lack of support for the dozens of deserving innovative/alternative Canadian bands that sprang up around the country in the seventies and eighties forced these acts to sign to small, independent labels, or go elsewhere.

What seemed a refreshing break from this cycle with the signing of bands like 54-40 and Chalk Circle in 1986/87, has, unfortunately, developed into an annoying new Canadian sound. This new sound is heavily influenced by jangling-guitar, country and folk influenced rock bands like R.E.M. Shall I list a few of these new Canadian bands? Just check last year's lineup of live entertainment on campus: Spirit of the West, Skydiggers, Grapes of Wrath, Northern Pikes, Blue Rodeo, Leslie Spit TreeO, Barney Bentall, Tragically Hip, and of course, 54-40. A new Canadian sound and a new Canadian look. Tragically, none of these bands is particularly innovative, nor are they very interesting.

Campus Entertainment has obviously decided to bank on the success these bands had on campus last year. Who can blame them? Last year's campus concerts were outrageously successful. Judging by the attendance to both the 54-40 show earlier this month and the Skydiggers/Leslie Spit TreeO double bill last Friday night, however, last year's success will not repeat itself.

I arrived at the SUB cafeteria at approximately 8:30 PM. Although the line-up outside the cafeteria was small, there was an annoying wait while identification cards were checked thoroughly for access to the valued wet stamp. Inside, the crowd was outnumbered by Campus Police and Bar Services staff. By 9:00 PM the crowd, predominantly frosh, began to grow. At 9:30 lights started to go out. This should have caused a ripple of excitement to run through the crowd; unfortunately, there was no crowd to speak of yet. Any excitement generated from the growing crowd outside the cafeteria was a result of their proximity to the wet stamp; they're getting close enough to smell it! At 9:40 band members appeared on stage to tune guitars and perform other pre-show rituals. 10:00 PM and the show finally began.

The Skydiggers were up first. They opened with We Don't Talk, a slow number with a country feel. The rhythm section sounded great; the harmonica, however, sounded like feedback. This song was followed by At 24, a Byrd-like country song. I got the feeling a trend was being set for the rest of the evening. The third song, Maybe It's Just, was more of the same. Making things worse, this band was boring onstage. The bass and kick drum, however, were locked tightly together, and this continued throughout the set; the sound tech had a nice bottom-heavy sound happening throughout the evening. Cool!

We were finally treated to some electric guitar on the fourth song, which we were subjected to a Stompin' Swamp Boogie was a nice, up-tempo Tom Connors tape, the Leslie Spit change from its predecessors. The TreeO took the stage. They opened band, however, remained boring; my immediate impression, not being familiar with this friend Mike remarked that you could not move. Hee-Hee! Too Bad You Say, I'll Be Home, It's Alright, What Can I Say, No One Could, and Accusations all sounded alike: the slow country feel permeates the however, and the very neat spacey Sydiggers' music and the unrequited love theme is tired. Talk No More, the eleventh song, picked up the pace, but it struck me that this was just a quicker version of the Skydiggers' signature tune, I Will Give.

The band then kicked into a vibrato guitar-led country song (Just Before Rain) in the Johnny Cash vein.

This traditional country piece was an improvement over the two preceding country/folk/rock'n'roll groove was stuck in. The next track, a cover of the Band classic, Mystery Train, continued this pleasant trend in the evening's performance.

Predictably, the crowd came quite animated for the next song, Monday Morning (Yes! A song they recognize!) Monday Morning, the next song, was an interesting number built around the guitar riff from the Byrds' So You Want To Be a Rock'n'Roll Star; it also kicked into David Bowie's Fame for a few bars before falling back into itself.

This brought us to the last song of their set, Leslie, a ballad which the drummer came out from behind his kit and clapped his hands into the microphone in lieu of actual drumming. The band received an encore; in fact, crowd response to Skydiggers was positive throughout their set, much more positive than it would prove to be for the TreeO.

The encore began with Wreck of the Old Ninety-Seven, a flat out country kicker that, with a four-on-the-floor kick drum and a harmonica weaving around the melody, went like a train. Unfortunately, the last song of their performance was a return to the sound of the first two-thirds of the performance. Boring!

The next track, Don't Colour Me Yet, proved to be interesting; it featured an interesting chord progression in a harmonic-minor mode, and abrupt tempo changes for its distinct musical sections, one of which was psychedelic -- sort of like the Jefferson Airplane's White Rabbit. By then the audience was in danger of disappearing altogether; fortunately, the next number was a straight out rocker with screaming-loud wah guitar, and it managed to rouse the few remaining patrons. Unfortunately, it was followed by a ballad with only an acoustic guitar accompanying the vocal. The momentum was lost.

The next three tracks seemed to blend together. It was not until the band covered a John Prine song, Angel from Montgomery, that my interest was rekindled. They played three more songs before wishing the audience, what was left of it, that is, a good night. The last of these was Heat (from the album), and it was the best of the three; it was an inspired rendition, and this in itself was commendable, given the fact that the band could not have remained unaware of the shrinking nature of their audience.

After a short break, during more and the TreeO obliged and returned for an encore; Stuck on Me was followed by the song this band ends all their shows with, Buffalo Springfield's For What It's Worth. Their rendition is manic and uptempo and it uses the Cool Jerk bassline. Neat-O!

Attendance to live entertainment on campus is a fickle thing that seems to go through stages. Some years it is phenomenal; other years, in spite of the high quality of the performers, attendance is pathetic. It may be too soon to determine if this is simply a poor year for concert attendance. Campus Entertainment would do well, however, to interpret the poor attendance thus far as a sign that students want a new slate of live entertainment this year. Bringing in the same bands that were so successful last year may prove to be a costly mistake. No more of this same boring new mainstream Canadian sound please.

Attendance to live entertainment on campus is a fickle thing that seems to go through stages. Some years it is phenomenal; other years, in spite of the high quality of the performers, attendance is pathetic. It may be too soon to determine if this is simply a poor year for concert attendance. Campus Entertainment would do well, however, to interpret the poor attendance thus far as a sign that students want a new slate of live entertainment this year. Bringing in the same bands that were so successful last year may prove to be a costly mistake. No more of this same boring new mainstream Canadian sound please.

**BEER, LIKE POLITICIANS, SHOULD GIVE YOU MORE THAN WIND.**

Beer should give you flavour. Lots of it. That's why more independent thinkers are discovering Ten Penny Old Stock Ale. Ten Penny. The taste of independence.

**A & A MUSIC**

**In Stock**  

**Glass Tiger**  
- Simple Mission \$8.99 \$14.99

**Tom Cochrane**  
- Mad Mad World \$9.99 \$16.99

**Sarah McLachlan**  
- Solace \$8.99 \$16.99

**Brian Adams**  
- Waking Up the Neighbours \$9.99 \$17.99

**Wednesday IS Student Appreciation Day**

**\$2.00 off** purchases retailing \$10.99 or MORE.

Must present valid Student I.D.

At all Fredericton & Oromocto A & A Locations.