

Eluding the sophomore jinx

BY GREG MCFARLANE

When Jim Moore was a small kid growing up in Wolfville, he used to pretend that he was a member of the Monkees. Listening to Rusty's new album *Sophomoric*, it is obvious that the bassist's penchant for pop has not left him. Like the Monkees, Rusty ropes listeners in and makes them sing along.

Fortunately, the Toronto-based band is compared to more than just the Monkees. Increasingly, they are being compared to the relatively obscure Replacements — a comparison that Moore feels is valid, due to the raspy voice of vocalist Ken McNeil (a la Paul Westerberg) and the band's unique mix of hooks and power chords.

Most of the melodies on *Sophomoric* are deceptively upbeat, although the lyrics betray that sound. This theme starts with the first track, "Doin' Fine", and "Empty Cell", the group's first single, maximizes it to the extreme. Punk-laced songs like "Son" and "Failed" help to set Rusty apart from other pop bands.

The edginess displayed throughout the disc is typified by

fast, scratchy guitars, distorted piano and Scott McCullough's infrequent solos on the guitar.

Rusty has departed from the field of contemporary Canadian alternative acts. Instead of being driven by a magnetic lead singer with a heartbroken sound, or loud, pounding songs, Rusty relies on the collective energy of the band and the catchiness of their tunes. This is both a blessing and a detriment, because on songs where that energy seems sub par, the band does disappoint.

"We don't want to make people sick, but [we want to] make songs that people sing when they are making breakfast or whatever," said Moore. "We're getting there. Even during a bad show we'll be more or less right on."

Their departure from the typical Canadian scene is not out of contempt for the music of other Canadian acts, because it is clear that the band respects many of those bands, but Moore does not buy into the "Canadian Phenomenon" that is being talked about in music lately. He says that music is the one thing that knows no borders.

"I watched the Junos last week, and they made me sick. When you

go [to the USA], they don't care where you are from. If you say that you are from Toronto or Canada, it's not a point of contention," said Moore. "What is happening in Canada is happening everywhere, so it's not a specifically Canadian thing."

Rusty hopes to move into the upper echelon of music, but doesn't feel any pressure to get

there quickly. Their debut CD, *Fluke*, sold only 40,000 copies and Moore seems focussed on developing songwriting skills, which he feels will evolve along with the group. To Moore, improvement is the key to having a long lasting career in music.

"We just concentrate on writing songs, that's the most important thing," said Moore.

Judging from several of the songs on *Sophomoric*, Moore's theory is plausible.

Rusty is coming to the McInnes Room on March 29th with Big Sugar and Sandbox, and although there are not any all ages gigs — which the band prefers to bar and university shows — they will be coming back in the future.



Some crazy, weird, fun lovin' stuff

BY STUART MCMILLAN

Zolty Cracker and Smak
Birdland Cabaret
March 13, 1997

Three years ago Gilles Zolty of Zolty Cracker and Kris Mitchell of Smak started an independent music festival in Vancouver called Music Waste. Originally planned as a one-time event, it received plenty of press and continued over the following two years. Now they have decided to promote the festival nationally by touring across Canada.

A three-piece band called Greyhound Tragedy came on first and these natives of Edmonton were nothing special. With their Hootie and the Blowfish-sounding singer droning away, they were unlucky to be opening for two superior bands. They did seem to enjoy themselves on stage, which was good because there really wasn't anyone else in the bar to see or hear them.

The second band of the night was Smak. These bright, shining boys from Vancouver deserve more praise than can be given out. Simply put, they ruled. An innovative, gifted guitarist, Kris Mitchell blew the roof off the Birdland like no one else has done in a long time. Dressed in shiny gear that looked like tin-foil, he took centre stage while jumping to and fro like Flea from the Chili Peppers. The sound of Smak is different from your usual, run of the mill band. Their music filters through a variety of influences

including jazz, rap, punk, and lounge. All three band members took turns singing, but Mitchell did most of it. Their highlight of the night was a rocking instrumental tune with Spanish-sounding guitar.

I talked to Smak's six string bassist, Travis Baker, and asked him how the tour was going. He said he enjoyed Halifax, but was disappointed with the small turn out.

With their second CD soon to be released, I expect Smak will return to the Halifax shores in the near future, bringing with them their crazy, weird and original sound.

The main act of the night, also from Vancouver, was Zolty Cracker. Fortunately, the audience was more drunk than it had been for the two previous bands. Promoting their new CD, *Flush*, vocalist, guitarist and main man Gilles Zolty carried the band smoothly through their set.

They put on a good show and had everyone in the bar singing along to songs like "Sceptical Pig", and waltzing to their French-sounding track, "L'immigrant". They also played new songs from *Flush* including "Pretty Feeling" and "Juice", but not many people in the bar knew these songs.

Zolty Cracker really stood out because of their amazing drummer who played the whole show standing up, and their electronic fiddle player.

Overall it was a great evening, with super performances from some talented out-of-town bands.



REVIEW

Go Please Stay
Zolty Cracker
Page Publications

Vancouver's Zolty Cracker released this debut album, *Go Please Stay*, back in 1995. The amount of filler on the fourteen song album is disappointing — it would have been better cut to ten songs.

The album begins with some sheep or goats making some pointless "baa baa" noises, before kicking-off the upbeat foot tapping track, "Get Me Out".

Zolty Cracker have a diverse sound, which is at moments punk, alternative, rock and one song, called "L'immigrant", is a cheesy French waltz.

The best part of the album is the song entitled "Move", which is a duet between lead singer Gilles Zolty and then bassist Annie Wilkinson. It is the only song on *Go Please Stay* in which a voice other than Zolty's is used.

The drums on the album have a very interesting quality, sounding more tribal than anything I've heard. This picks Zolty Cracker up, giving them a different sound compared to many other bands and, along with Zolty's husky voice, makes for a promising future.

STUART MCMILLAN