

OPINION...

THE "COVER" MALAISE

It seems that most anywhere you go in this province to see a live band, you end up standing in front of a bunch of musicians who never entertained an original thought in their lives and are merely playing cover versions of the hits of the day. But why?

Well, you asked for it, didn't you? The agencies booking bands in the Maritimes have no interest in working with or promoting artists who play original material. After all, where would they play? Everyone knows when it comes to putting a band in front of an audience around here, the lowest common denominator rules and if you try it any other way, you're going to lose money, patrons, the reputation of your venue, and heaven knows what else. If a band can't play "Sweet Home Alabama" or "Smoke on the Water" at the drop of a hat, they aren't worth seeing right?

This is indicative of the patently wrong-headed attitude prevalent in New Brunswick today. The argument goes that people just want to get drunk and stupid and sing along with the same pop tripe that their parents did whether it be the Beach Boys or the Doobie Bros. There is something dreadfully wrong with our attitude toward music, art, and creativity when 99 times out of 100, bands that visit our province play covers of the top 40 hits of the day or versions of solid gold standards from the 60's and 70's to the exclusion of original material.

The mountain of stupidity that has to be moved when it comes to this question didn't appear overnight. A big part of the mountain has to be our attitude toward radio. Most people genuinely believe that when a radio station says they're counting down the top 40 records, that these lists of records are carved in stone somewhere in Northern California and are compiled only after millions of man-hours of exhaustive research because the public has to know.

Well, this is not true. Record lists are compiled for radio station programmers to preserve the homogeneity and mundanity that is radio. The radio industry does nothing to acknowledge originally or broaden the public perception of popular music. Any song being played on AM radio in Canada today is there because it sounds like something else that came before it and because it doesn't sound out of place between a car commercial and pimple cream ad. Any music you hear on the radio that is introduced as "new" must be a style that has already won programming acceptance. It's not really new at all, you see?

When you patronize a bar or event where a cover band is playing, you are reinforcing a ghoulish and decrepit system--a system where unoriginality is rewarded and applauded. It seems to me that even though the name on the marquee might be changing each week, we're hearing the same songs, but from a different group of musicians. If I pay to see a rock and roll performance, I want to see what original creative ideas that group of musicians has to offer. By purchasing a ticket for said performance, I'm saying YOU show ME what you can do, and I don't want to see another haggard version of someone else's hit song from the golden age of radio.

UNB has a fine entertainment organization working on campus who are endeavoring to bring in musical acts who play their own compositions. For this they should be applauded and I wish them continued success. Establishments that bring in "cover" or "tribute" acts have to appeal to everyone in order to sell enough liquor to justify them having live entertainment at all--at least that's their argument. If you believe attitudes toward music and art have to change in this province I would encourage you to attend the events organized by your campus entertainment body and provide them with the kind of feedback they need to ensure that the lowest common denominator creeps no further into our consciousness.

Chris Vautour



by Lynne Wanyeki

Have you ever noticed how placidly nonchalant, how (let's face it) dumb-looking cows are? Their whole philosophy seems to be one of minimal movement, blank stares and ever-working jaws. They have to be the most non-aggressive animals in the world - or so I thought. In one of my more profound moments of contemplation (yes, they do happen even to me), I struck upon a brilliant observation. After about 10 minutes in class, students develop an ailment, which for want of a better word, I'll call The Cow Syndrome.

Ignoring the finer points of grammar regarding the use of the word "syndrome" (which I understand as being something I can sometimes substitute the word "disease" with) let's get right down to the symptoms of The Cow Syndrome. I know you'll all recognize this scenario. Enter class. Scraping as chairs are shifted around to their most comfortable positions. Shuffling of assorted books, papers, etc., as timetables are consulted to confirm that this is where one is actually meant to be (have you ever been in the totally embarrassing position of walking into a classroom and actually sitting down before you realize that you not only don't recognize the people around you, but that the professor is rattling off a sentence in German and somehow you were under the impression you were in an English class? No...you haven't? Well, let's not get into that then). Where was I? Ah yes...Vague mutterings and random giggles from around the class. Then enters professor. Reverent silence as he/she sorts him/herself out. Class begins to a rapt look of attentiveness from all (ok, nearly all) students. Within minutes, eyes shift attention from said professor and begin darting around the room. Out come the pencils for those who doodle. Back into a state of complete laxity go the bodies of those whose primary purpose in class is some form of meditation. And here it comes, The Cow Syndrome.

The eyes of those whose bodies have achieved that flowing union with their chairs suddenly fixate on something in the distance. Their faces go absolutely blank. Some of them even achieve a rhythm to the chewing of their bubble gum (the Cud Factor). The word "mellow" seems to emanate from their very pores. The words of the labouring professor waft gently through the air, disturbing not at all the state of serenity most of the class has by now achieved.

Of course, you have too, those reckless dissenters, those crazy non-conformists, who take a while longer to succumb to The Cow Syndrome. These can be roughly grouped as: (1) Those who genuinely want to listen and comprehend said professor (they are extremely rare, having almost anomalous powers of concentration); (2) those nervous wrecks who twitch and fiddle and continuously glance from the clock to the professor to the rest of the class, and then generally drop something, which disturbs the reverie of those already experiencing The Cow Syndrome (they are intensely irritating and have the most resistance to The Cow Syndrome); and (3) those loathsome "pseudo-intellectuals" who ask the usually irrelevant questions and make usually 2 or 3 contradictory statements of belief in one class solely to impress their intellect on either the professor or the remainder of the class or both. But, they usually fail miserably, as despite their desire to be clever, they usually demonstrate an amazing degree of ignorance. Not my use of the word "usually" throughout this description - liable for libel, that kind of thing(???). I hate pseudo-intellectuals with a passion.

But even these dissenters, faced with the over-whelming power of the Blank Stare Factor of The Cow Syndrome, eventually subside - and the professor alone is left in the real world. This must be extremely infuriating to the poor professors and I can quite imagine the conversation taking place in the huddles of professors I sometimes see in the hallway:

Prof. 1: "So how was your first class?"

Prof. 2: "Oh God. Awful - that f---ing Cow Syndrome again."

Prof. 3: "Oh no, not this early in the morning. My nerves can't take it. I haven't reached my caffeine quota yet."

Prof. 2: "There were a few agitators though, so it wasn't that bad."

Prof. 1: "I don't know. I'm against the whole idea of non-conformism myself..."

Prof. 3: "Well I think we should find a solution to the whole Cow Syndrome thing. Maybe a department meeting?"

Prof. 2: "No way! We'll catch the blasted Syndrome ourselves. Takes ages to go away - kind of like a cold..."

Well, I don't know about that. It seems to me that The Cow Syndrome vanishes as soon as we exit class. Maybe it's the chemical fumes from the wall-paint. Maybe this whole Mugwump wasn't that profound. Maybe my moment of contemplation occurred while under the influence of ... you guessed it... The Cow Syndrome.

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