

# oui yes



# for the

# Shuffle Demons

**The Shuffle Demons**  
Thursday, Nov. 5  
CHSC

Canada. The land of the free and the home of the identity crisis and paranoia that stems from having too much freedom. It's a bizarre cultural aberration unique to this country's psyche. It permeates everything. Canada does the same thing over and over again. Compare the *Crash Test Dummies* and the Charlottetown Accord, for instance. Both were promoted and discussed and hyped and toured the country to the point of public nausea, and now are drying out with Ben Jonson and Meech Lake at Betty Ford less than a year later. We find something actually produced in Canada that we like (or *someone* likes), and the astonishment sends us tearing around like kindergartners with a loose tooth. "Look! Look!" We yell, until people eventually begin to respond with "Yeah, yeah...I heard you the first time." Maybe it's big brother down south. The American recording industry and ruling politicians have no problem at all coming up with inane and insidious bands and bills and then marketing them properly. Make everyone think *Rick Astley* is the biggest thing since the *Beatles*. Sure, why not? They made a mint. In Arizona they managed to convince people that Martin Luther King Day shouldn't be a public holiday, too. It's all in the attitude. The problem is that we do it backwards. *The Crash Test Dummies* are a good band. The notion of having a constitution that lets everyone do their own thing is a good one. I like both of these things. I like chocolate cheesecake, too, but eleven pounds of it a day? Too much of a good thing is detrimental

no matter how you look at it.

There is an answer to this problem, however - this debilitating habit of combining self abuse and low self-esteem with over-eager, wimpy enthusiasm. A unifying conclusion that combines almost radical patriotism with perseverance, incredible talent, total disregard for popular trend, fad, or whim, a collective love of occupation, dedication, and apparently frequent bouts of dementia. *The Shuffle Demons*. Not politically correct, not politically incorrect. Politically unaware, maybe. *Spadina Bus* and *Out of My House Roach*, two of the Demons' most popular tunes from a few years ago (everyone remembers - *dug deep down in my pockets, to try and find some coin, but much to my chagrin, all I found was my groin - Hey!*) were wonderful creations which spoke to all those who thought that you couldn't write great songs about stupid stuff anymore. Some of their other work like *The Puker* (when your only goal is to make it to the toilet bowl, you're the Puker!) and their patented *Hockey Night in Canada* theme song version, graduated into the newer concoctions from last year and this such as *Cheese On Bread* (*Cheese! Cheese on bread! - that's all they say, come to think of it*), and *Deli Tray* (*Deli tray! Deli tray! If we don't see one we won't play!*). I think these newer songs speak to the Canadian generation of today, and speak more clearly and specifically to the emerging nineties than even the powerful suggestions on state and polity made in the late eighties by *Spadina Bus* and *Out of My House Roach*.

Well, no. I guess I don't think that. If there is something to say about the more recent work, it's that *Spadina Bus* and *Out of My House Roach* were about being poor

musicians in Toronto, and *Cheese on Bread* and *Deli Tray* are about food.

Now that I think of it, "politically unaware" is a pretty good call.

Aside from the neo-cubist dress code, the occasional wig and hat, creative facial hair, chaotic, untrained and potentially dangerous concepts of dancing, and a bass player who pulls drumsticks through his strings with his teeth while screaming maniacally into a mike, the *Shuffle Demons* are most likely three of the four best saxophone players to grace this campus maybe ever, and have a rhythm section with the constitution to hold tight the groove over the crazed wash of horns. The ability to slide in and out of a groove, to slip from disciplined cacophony to driving beat puts a spark back into what jazz is supposed to be all about - and I quote Webster - "...music characterized by syncopated rhythms, contrapuntal ensemble playing, and improvisation with special melodic features peculiar to the individual player." Whether the *Demons* are classifiable as jazz is up to the listener (and I'm sure most purists will snigger and snort), but for me, Jazz is about having fun with music. It's about finding a way to play the *Hockey Night in Canada* theme or Gordon Lightfoot's *Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald*: it's about pushing the limits. The instrument becomes the tool. Stop and think for a minute how amazing human beings are. Music really is one of the few things keeping our heads above the primordial ooze. And it's so much darn fun.

These guys are what is known as "players." They are musicians first, and staunchly maintain the almost maladjusted fervor for expressing themselves musically (of course there is the added bonus of the likes of Demon "Stitch" Wynston on drums who seems to enjoy the more physical aspects of self-expression as much as the

musical ones - Pee Wee Herman meets Buddy Rich. Weird.). They seem to need to play. The Thursday night gig came after a drive that morning from a workshop in Montreal, and they left again Friday to play in Halifax. I think this demonstrates something like dedication mixed with obsessive compulsive behavior. They're *players* (and what's more, they're Canadians - I remember them calling into CBC's *As it Happens* from somewhere in Europe to wish Canada a happy birthday on July 1st).

The *Demons* have seen a few roster changes over the years, most notably the loss of Mike Murley to the more pretentious confines of traditional jazz (Murley's quartet played the Harvest Jazz and Blues Festival this year, and I'll admit I liked him better with the test-pattern suit and shades. The quartet was sort of dry). As well should be noted the addition of Demon George Koller on upright bass. Brilliant, psychotic, a showman and a musician, Koller has a nice wig. And sensible shoes. He replaced the other guy. Good trade. The *Demons* have weathered the changes sans the normal fofoerah that goes with them (squabbles over copyright, discussions of whether to change the name, maybe try out some new hairstyles and spandex for a "new look", a shift in musical direction, the usual.), and remain quintessentially the *Shuffle Demons*. Maybe it's the looming goatee and Coleman/R2D2esque alto of Richard Underhill. Maybe it's the patented convulsions of Stitch Wynston. Who cares?

So we had fun and learned something at the good old CHSC Thursday night. CBC doesn't have to like you. You don't have to sit around brainstorming about what would go over well with the kids today. And you certainly don't have to be obsessed with breaking into the American market for some aberrative form of self-gratification (I suppose some people like the idea of quick cash - so be it). It's Canada, folks. Believe it or not, Canadian music is not only unique and expresses a culture, but it's good, too. Funny

how we don't want to believe that.

So I think the *Shuffle Demons* should make up some kind of Canadian delegation to the UN. Maybe stop by, play a few tunes for the representatives of the more war-torn of the member nations, and remind the world that it may be beastly cold, a tad apathetic, and just (*just*) this side of disorganized, but we don't give our resident nationalist lunatics guns, we give them saxophones.

Chris Hunt

PS

I really didn't want to do this, but everytime I saw that odious ad for the Tragically Hip in Brunswickan Issue #8 with all those wholesome-looking, 90120 wannabees smiling vacuously out at me making incomprehensibly flaccid statements like "It's supposed to be Huge! Of Course I'm going" and "I wouldn't miss it for the World!!" I almost stagger under the conception that anyone, even the misguided camp counselors at the Student Union, would think that this kind of thing would attract a crowd. This is a university folks, not a cruise line. I'd like to think we can rise above the clique-group SRC garbage that characterized Junior High so well. "Be Hip, Don't miss it!!" Please.

I hope the show went well for the band, and I sincerely hope everyone had a good time (for twenty bucks, they'd better have), and I hope that the kind of mindless, primitive promotion displayed by the Student Union is a hastily conceived, panic-stricken attempt to avoid another *Blue Rodeo* money pit and not a sincere attempt at attracting university students.