

## Freedom's music gels on new album

BY MARK CAMPBELL

WITH A COVER sporting a famous Nellie McClung quote and a rabid looking animal, the debut album of the Sons of Freedom certainly looked unique. Fortunately, so was the music. The band bristled with raw energy lacking in many of today's so-called rock bands. Certainly a song called "Fuck the System" had given me cause for concern before I bought or heard the album. I feared this was another band content to chant mindless clichés over lame music.

**MUSIC**  
Sons of Freedom  
Gump

Nothing could have been further from the truth. While the album was original and vibrant, it sagged at times into dense and plodding progressions that seemed to be heading nowhere. It was, however, a promising debut that made the band one worth watching. Yet, when I heard they had parted ways with their record company, I

thought they were destined to join the other one album Canadian bands that showed promise, but faded into obscurity.

Last fall, the band was signed to Chrysalis in the US, and while that signing appears to be in jeopardy due to the recent buyout of the label, MCA Canada appears dedicated to developing this promising band. This second album, *Gump*, is an improvement in that the songs are, for the most part, shorter and less cluttered than those on their debut album without sacrificing the raw power that characterized their debut.

When the band gels, as they do on the opening track "You're No Good," the music is dense and often concerned with the familiar themes of relationships and getting your act together, there is a wry and acerbic wit at work here. "You're No Good" is buoyed by the strong bass lines of Don Binns and the metallic crunch of guitarists Don Harrison and James Kingston, the band's lyricist and vocalist.

Some critics have had problems

adjusting to Kingston's style of singing and though his range as a vocalist is limited, his vocal style is a major factor in the band's unique sound. He whoops, snarls, bellows and almost yodels, and, in the slow tempo number "I Can See," his vocals are surprisingly tender. It is at once a haunting and touching moment for this band, aided by some of Kingston's most straightforward lyrics: "As we spy upon the children coming running home from school/As I tell you that I love you and you say you love me too," which make this one of the most memorable songs on the album.

Elsewhere, Kingston takes up more serious subject matters, such as substance abuse on "Call Me," one of the album's best songs. Here, Kingston chooses not to moralize but to depict the harm of dependency on anything that brings pleasure. In this case, it is drug abuse. Kingston's lyrics suggest the frustration of the concerned onlooker; "I must be mad/Mad to try to help you though you need it/You need it pretty bad/I understand/ Standing here and begging won't change you/Help detoxify your heart."

Getting your act together is the basis of "Jesus and Jim" a harrowing look at a splintering mind. The narrator is haunted by demons, calling out to some saviour ("I tried so hard to reach you/I wanted to believe you.") And while the chorus hints that Jesus is trying to reach him with his "maker on the line," there appears to be little hope in the closing lines; "Given the chance I'd crawl back up the womb/I can't stand the sight of another day/There's no relief in the drugs that I take/So gimme a reason I should stay."

Kingston's humour is best evident in "USA Long Distance," a humorous recounting of his impressions of our southern neighbours; "The first time I saw her/She was a black marine/The next time I saw her/She was a drag show queen." There are also two versions of "Dreamgirl," each one sporting different lyrics. The first version is driven by a machine gun back beat, and the second version ends the album. Each one is driven by the tight and muscular arrangements developed by Kingston and the three Dons.

Produced by Chris Wardman (TPOH, Tragically Hip, Leslie Spit Tree-o) the sound lives up to the saw blade that graces their logo. The band occasionally falters, though. "Circle, Circle" seems to go nowhere and there are moments when the thick arrangements threaten to plod, but this song is strong follow-up album and bodes well for Sons of Freedom, regardless of whether they ever find mass acceptance.



A forgotten yet adjustable building.

PHOTO: ALAN BIRCHER

BY ROBERT CURRIE

WHAT KIND of museum is this? Theresa Hubbard has been hearing that question ever since she and partner Alexander Birchler opened a museum in a forgotten South End building.

**EXHIBITION**  
Days to be moved — A Store Room of Adjustable Items  
A Forgotten South End Bldg.

"This is a museum about the history of this building," Hubbard explains, "but it's also a museum that talks about history in general—it's a museum about museums."

Days to be moved — a Store Room of Adjustable Items is an exhibition in and about a former Chinese laundry on the corner of Barrington and Inglis

Streets. Sculptors Hubbard and Birchler, who act as the museum's attendants, researched the history of the 60 year old building, compiling personal accounts and records of the location's past. These documents are filed in the museum's Inventory Catalogue, available for visitors to examine.

Hubbard and Birchler take turns acting as the museum's attendants, engaging in discussion, answering questions and inviting visitors to contribute to the museum's files.

Almost filling the building's interior is a scale model of the building itself, covered in plastic sheeting, labeled with museum-style tags. It, like the collection of books which line the building's walls, is on display, but is also in storage. The presentation of the artifacts evokes both the building's past as a storeroom and

the storerooms of conventional museums, where items not on display are kept, banished from public view.

How do the residents of the neighborhood react to the sudden appearance of a museum next door?

"They don't question it at all," Birchler answers. "There is hardly anybody who really questions the purpose of it. They just see and react and they tell what they know about the building."

The structure was built in 1930 for the Kee Fong family, serving as home and business. Renovated in 1974, it has recently been used to store books and as an office.

Museum creators Hubbard and Birchler have practiced museum-making in Banff, Gdansk, Poland and elsewhere in Halifax. While trained as artists, they see their work as an alternative to the conventions of artwork and galleries.

"I find that how galleries work in general is that they focus on one audience," says Birchler. "Projects like this really encourage me, and encourage other people, to communicate."

Birchler would like the museum to "get people to stop and reflect on their own lives—it is an interruption." Whether prompted by curiosity about the artistic and philosophical issues addressed by the museum, or a thirst for local history, a visit is certain to be an intriguing interruption. Unlike conventional museums, which encourage passive viewing, this is a museum which makes the visitor part of the contents.

Days to be moved — a Store Room of Adjustable Items is open every day from 2-7 p.m. until March 28 at 5357 Inglis St.

## Displaying history uniquely

BY R. CURRIE

SOMEWHERE IN THE VOID between school and career lives the twentysomething generation. Overeducated, underemployed and unabashedly cynical, they are the poverty jet-set, the downwardly mobile. Forever in the shadow of the baby boomers, they are a generation largely ignored. Until *Generation X*.

**FICTION**  
*Generation X*  
by Douglas Coupland

Douglas Coupland's *Generation X* is a primer on the irony-driven lives of the under-30 demographic. Subtitled *Tales for an Accelerated Culture*, *Generation X* charts the wanderings of Dag, Claire and Andy as they search for amusing diversions from

their McJobs ("low pay, low prestige, low benefits, low future"). They move in cycles of departure and arrival, interspersed with picnics in the desert, collisions with ex-lovers and family and the odd bout of semi-intentional vandalism. And while the plot may be simple, even unremarkable, this is a deeply resonant novel.

*We live small lives on the periphery; we are marginalized and there's a great deal in which we choose not to participate... We had compulsions that made us confuse shopping with creativity, to take downers and assume that merely renting a video on a Saturday night was enough. But now that we live here in the desert, things are much, much better.*

It's not success that Dag, Claire and Andy pursue—it's amusement. Amusement takes many forms—a mania for media trivia, a twisted love of suburbia and a fascination with dead celebrities. But the chief enter-

tainment of the novel's three central characters is storytelling. They tell each other "bedtime stories," intricate, funny tales of exile and apocalypse, searching and loss, like the story of Buck the astronaut, who crash-lands on the forgotten asteroid Texlahoma, where it is always 1974. What follows is a perfectly off-balance reworking of the Sleeping Beauty story: "Have you ever thought of being a rep for aloe after you retire from being an astronaut, Buck?"

Coupland's biggest achievement is that he has written a sly social allegory disguised as a novel. The trio of *Generation X* ambassadors are part of that allegory, but just to make things perfectly clear, Coupland fills the margins of the book with cartoons, definitions, slogans and assorted factoids. Alongside a passage about a particularly dull couple, we find the definition of *squires*:

*The most common X generation subgroup and the only subgroup given to breeding. Squires exist almost exclusively in couples and are recognizable by their frantic attempts to recreate a semblance of Eisenhower-era plenitude in their daily lives in the face of exorbitant housing prices and two-job lifestyles.*

This is typical of Coupland's wicked psychographic hair-splitting. He identifies and then subdivides demographic groups with arch dedication without being preachy, rueful without whining. This is a refreshingly contemporary novel, one that looks to the past for styles to cannibalize, not for nostalgia. *Generation X* is a time capsule for a time which, according to the 60s-besotted media doesn't exist: the present.

## Playing a sweet and sour life

BY JULIE LUOMA

THERE'S SOMETHING wonderfully appealing about listening to a woman lucidly reflecting on her life. But there's also something disturbing about it when it hits home.

**THEATRE**  
Shirley Valentine  
Neptune Theatre

For all its humour, Neptune Theatre's latest production, *Shirley Valentine*, starring Nicola Lipman, lends an enlightening perspective to "kitchen sink comedy." Written by the author of *Educating Rita*, the brilliantly paced script crackles with honest outbursts of laughter at others. Lipman delivers Willy Russell's seamlessly sewn text with a dazzling sense of comic timing that was greeted with a standing ovation opening night.

The play opens with Shirley coming home from shopping to prepare chips and egg for an unappreciative hubby. Alone on stage, Shirley talks about her 42-year-old British housewife's reality and the little life she's lived "when inside there's so much more." The catalyst for her musing is a "feminist" friend's offer to vacation

together in Greece.

Putting away groceries and peeling onions and potatoes, Shirley good-naturedly remembers her school years. One teacher rejected her correcting answer. Another sarcastically announced she'd go nowhere in life—and how it was just as well because her lousy Geography marks indicated she'd get lost if she tried.

In more sobering moments, Shirley remembers her school experience soon taught her to say "I hated everything. But what I really hated was me." Reflecting on a friendship that didn't work out she asks "did something happen? Or did nothing happen?" This same question applies to her soured marriage where "I love you" excuses her husband's inattention and harsh words.

Shirley's reminiscing reveals abundance of thought-provoking little quirks caused by years of housewifery. Like talking to the wall, "don't I wall?" Or comparing women being misled about orgasm to asking Sigmund Freud for directions at the bus stop.

Shirley agonizes over whether to set off on a Mediterranean voyage, torn between her fear of life beyond the wall and her boredom with life as "Saint Joan of the fitted units." Ultra-

mately, she decides to prepare a fortnight's worth of dinners and leave without a word. "With a bit of luck, he won't even notice I'm not here."

Shirley heads off hoping for liberating adventures as simple as the "excitement of not knowing what the day will hold." Her Mediterranean voyage proves fruitless when it comes to her symbolic dream of liberation: "drinking wine in a country where the grape is grown." But she unexpectedly and rapturously discovers the clitoris with a lover she names Christopher Columbus.

On a holiday romance with herself, Shirley falls in love with the idea of living. She decides her youthful self got lost in "all this unused life" and that she won't follow her suitcase home. She earns her keep at Columbus' taverna and rebuffs her husband's demands to return. When she shows up to reclaim her, she announces: "I used to be the mother. I used to be your wife. But now I'm Shirley Valentine again. Would you like to join me for a drink?"

A punchy mix of memoirs of a sweet and sour life, *Shirley Valentine* is a refreshing thirst quencher with a light after taste.



Sons of Freedom feeling free to wear black.



# GENERATION X