

Furnaceface, not just a warm smile

by Geoff Ineson

In case you didn't feel like showing up, Furnaceface played a swell two night gig at the Birdland Cabaret last weekend. The Ottawa band has just finished a two week tour of Eastern Canada, and I caught up with them before Saturday's show.

Gaz: What would each of you be listening to if you were home now and pressed play on your cassette decks?

Martin: *Electric Music Club*, Mercury.

Tom: I think on the turntable is a Gordon Lightfoot record, and I think in the CD player is a twenty-five song indie compilation: *Hooked on Indie Punk*, or something like that.

Pat: PJ Harvey.

Dave: I don't listen to music at home. I rarely put anything on...

Pat: *Barney's Greatest Hits*.

Dave: I have a daughter, it's probably going to be that record I got... Raffi, *The Banana Phone*. That's a good record, actually.

Gaz: How long have you been together as Furnaceface?

Dave: Since '89.

Tom: The record came out in '90. We were jamming as a three piece, Dave, Pat and I. In the summer of '89 we wrote all the songs for our first release.

Dave: We wrote that classic hit "The Summer of '89."

Tom: Which Bryan Adams ripped-off. That was *Let it Down*, a cassette, and from that there were two seven-inch singles. And then *Just Buy It* came out in '92, Marty was in the band at that point. Then just in Sept. of '94, *This Will Make You Happy* came out.

Gaz: How was *Just Buy It* received in Canada?

Dave: In Canada it was just excellent. We got great radio play on college stations and it sold way better than we thought it would.

Tom: We thought it would just sell locally, like a thousand copies.

Gaz: What's the best criteria to exercise when you're buying a sweater? What are you going to look for?

Dave: It's got to be big!

Tom: It's got to be black!

Pat: Green.

Tom: No, green.

Dave: Green, or this kind of red. I mean that's it. There's no other kind.

Tom: And it has got to be two dollars or less.

Pat: And a good knit, I think that's important.

Gaz: Canada has been described as a series of towns strung together by a railway. What in your lyrics expresses a Canadian experience?

Tom: Some people might say the sarcasm we use is a very Canadian humour.

Dave: I've heard that, "they sing with a very Canadian accent."

Tom: I don't think there's anything lyrically Canadian about our stuff. We have references to Lee Aaron...

Pat: And a government cheque.
Dave: And the Canadian Postal Service.

Tom: But I think those things could be understood universally.

Dave: We're not a Canadian, political, satirical band or anything like that. We don't sing about...

Tom: The GST.

Gaz: How contrived or spontaneous are your lyrics?

Tom: Well, we'd never admit to them as being contrived.

Pat: They're not that spontane-

ous at all. The end of the spectrum of being spontaneous.

Tom: But at the same time it always gives me a bad taste in my mouth when I hear a song by a band and it's really obvious that they said, "ok, we've got to have a song on the environment." And they went out and wrote a song about the environment. You can just pick it out right away. I think any time a band tries to do that kind of thing

That's our Prime Minister, the guy with the tartan



they never pull it off. A lot of our songs deal with difficult and touchy topics but we never say, "ok, we're going to write a song about the safety of women" or something like that. I mean that we write a song like "Love Her Buy Her A Gun" just on not rethinking about that in that kind of way. Or in "She Thinks She's Fat" we didn't think that it was going to be a big comment on women's self image. I think that if you set out to do something in that kind of way it'll sound totally bogus. Whereas we just write the song and try to be intelligent lyrically, and not really over analyze it.

Gaz: A friend of mine wanted to know whether you used the instruments in your underwater video of the song "About To Drown" since the shooting?

Dave: Well, the one bass guitar was very poorly made obviously, it fell apart into three pieces.

Martin: The drum you could still play.

Tom: We sold it after that.

Pat: The guitar is in the bathroom of Songbird Music in Ottawa. I wouldn't try to play it. It was kind of rusty.

Dave: There was another guitar...

Pat: That became part of an architecture project.

Gaz: Have any of you ever caught anything that you may be ashamed to admit?

Tom: Cod.

Dave: Yeah, last weekend in Newfoundland.

Tom: It's totally fake that there's no cod there. We caught huge cod.

Martin: Nope.

Gaz: When you were last in Halifax you played at the Grawood and I was wondering how that went for you?

Pat: It kinda sucked.

Tom: People that worked at the club came up to us about half way through and said, "Yeah, it's really too bad you're playing here because nobody really likes to come here." So that's what it was like. You can imagine it from there. But Birdland is a great place. It's got to be one of the best clubs in the country.

Gaz: What's the furthest south you've played and how did that go?

Tom: Iowa city.

Dave: Now that was with the Flaming Lips and the Flaming Lips were excellent.

Pat: No, we never played Iowa city.

used duct tape for?

Dave: Couldn't have been more than twenty minutes ago. We're a band after all.

Tom: I was using it at St. F.X. for putting up the banners which we project films on.

Pat: I taped up my bad knee. I have a bum knee.

Dave: I taped my drum sticks because they're falling apart.

Gaz: Have you ever disagreed on the type of transportation you use between gigs?

Pat: Funny you should mention...

Martin: You mean, 'have you ever agreed?'

Dave: We're divided into two camps. One camp is the lease camp, and the other camp is the "no, it'll be fine, we just have to get it fixed and spend another two thousand dollars and it'll be great" camp. There's like these fireworks inside

Tom pretty well has a full-time job and Marty has got his own business which is more than a full-time job.

Pat: My professional career has suffered drastically from playing in a band.

Dave: We all do so much other stuff that I don't wake up and think, "Furnaceface: and I've got to go and do this today." I wake up in the morning and I got to go to work.

Martin: I wake up in the morning and go "frig, the landlord is knocking at the door again!"

Tom: Furnaceface has never been our career. We're in a band, we write music and we make music we really like, and it boggled our minds when our second record started selling across the country, and we won the awards and stuff like that. It was just so weird. We never expected that to happen. It's already gone so far beyond the success we ever expected that if it just goes back to where we started out when we were selling a hundred copies of a single to our friends in town, and still making good music we liked. It's like we don't really think of it in that kind of way. We're very serious about it...

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Dave: We don't really make career decisions for the band. We make decisions based on how it's going to affect the other part of our life. A lot of bands would be very happy to be in our situation and sign an endorsement deal with 'Labatts' or 'Export A' or something which gets offered to you when you start getting notoriety, but that sort of stuff means that we have to go out and play on that...

Tom: We're very worried about things which are offered to us for money against what we really want to do and try to find some balance in there because we have an idea in our minds of what's the band about and what we want to do and we don't want to compromise that. It sounds kinda fake, I know.

Martin: The only thing that freaks me out is when we drive up to a club and there's a line-up going down the street. I still don't think they're here to see us. They must be here for some other reason.

Tom: It is kinda' odd but it's also really complimentary too.

Last weekend, Sydney, Nova Scotia was the host city of the seventh annual East Coast Music Awards. If you cared enough about all of the ceremony, you were there or you watched it on TV. For those of you who just want to know who won, here are the big winners.

Alternative/rock artist: Eric's Trip

Recording group/duo: Rawlins Cross

Jazz artist: Chris Mitchell

Pop/rock artist: Rawlins Cross

Album of the year: Lennie Gallant, *The Open Window*

Roots/traditional artist: The Barra MacNeils

Live act: Ashley MacIssac

Video of the year: Which Way Does the River Run. Artist - Lennie Gallant, director - Lynne Charlebois

Instrumental artist: Ashley MacIssac

Entertainer of the year: The Irish Descendants

SOCAN song of the year: Which Way Does the River Run, writer - Lennie Gallant.

Country artist: Rita MacNeil

Female artist: Theresa Malenfant

Classical artist: Symphony Nova Scotia

Acadian recording of the year: Les Mechants Maquereaux