

# Coaxing an interview out of Sloan's Chris Murphy

## Short and Snappy

**Gaz:** If you could fire one local radio or TV personality, who would it be?

**Murphy:** "I hate Paul Menier. He's such a fuckin' goof. He reeks." [OK, I suggested Paul Menier, but the quote is real.]

**Gaz:** What's the best and worst thing about the new supercity?

**Murphy:** "Is Dartmouth in Halifax? I guess that's the worse thing."

**Gaz:** If you met pirate radio DJ Chris Sheppard on the street, what would you say to him?

**Murphy:** "Cray-zee."

**Gaz:** What was your favourite movie this year?

**Murphy:** "Rumble in the Bronx. Fargo."

**Gaz:** What album do you keep playing from last year?

**Murphy:** "The Stereolab record — *Emperor Tomato Ketchup*."

**Gaz:** Name someone who made you laugh last year?

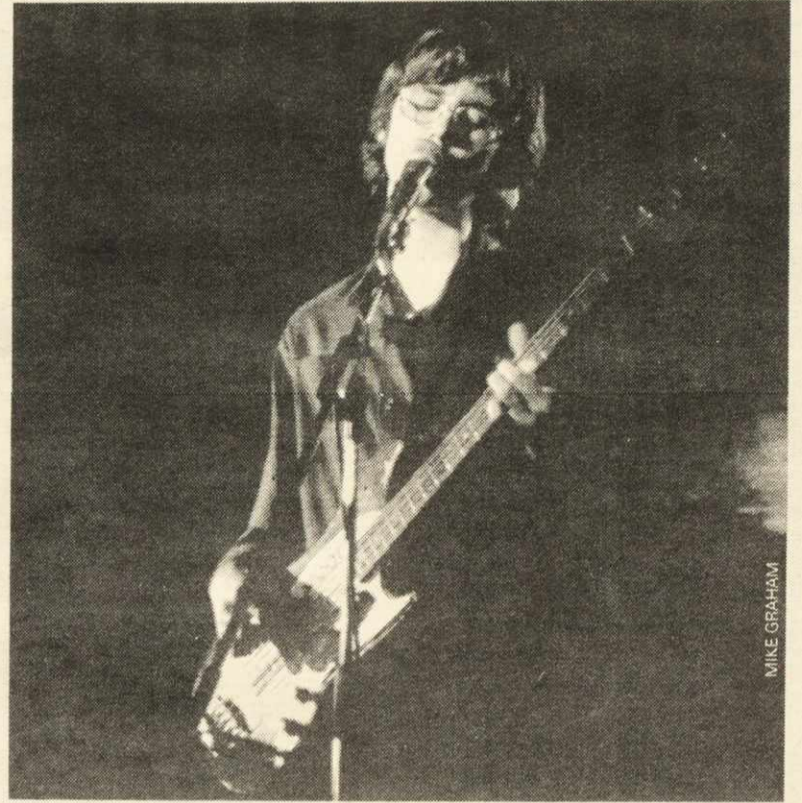
**Murphy:** "Pete Elkas from the Local Rabbits. He does this thing called the cocaine jock dance which is the funniest thing I've ever seen. He's dancing and basically checking out his own muscles. And then he pretends to

snort all this coke and then he starts going really fast and starts yelling at everybody. You just do that sort of classic JJ Rossey's beat...and sort of careen out of control."

**Gaz:** Would you ever release a greatest hits or double live album?

**Murphy:** "I think live we stink. It's fun, maybe to come watch. The recordings are always shitty. I hate when people record us. I'd rather make a live video."

"We don't have hits, per se."



MIKE GRAHAM

BY TIM COVERT

Perhaps the most disturbing thing about Sloan's Chris Murphy is that he admits to recently purchasing the entire Rush back catalogue and listens to little radio other than the Oldies station.

The most surprising thing is that he when you talk to him on the phone he doesn't come across as the band clown he seems to be on stage.

"I don't wanna to be the clown, I wanna be the sexy guy," joked Murphy. "I sometimes think that I drive Jay (band member Jay Ferguson) nuts as the funny guy. Sometimes it's cause I'm self-conscious and sometimes it's cause it's what I want to do."

Murphy (a Dal graduate), Ferguson (Kings), Patrick Pentland (Kings) and drummer Andrew Scott are playing this Saturday at the Dalhousie SUB's McInnes Room. Opening for the band are local acts The Euphonic and The Inbreds.

Sloan was one of the bands that were always named as pioneers in the heyday of the burgeoning "Halifax Music Scene" in 1992 and 1993. In those years Halifax was compared to Seattle in terms of the proliferation of successful bands. Moncton's Eric's Trip and Halifax's Jale were signed to Seattle's Sup Pop label, and Sloan signed with DGC. It's common knowledge that the label wasn't pleased with Sloan's second record *Twice Removed*, which was a stylistic departure from the sound that sold so many copies of their debut *Smeared*.

When asked if the quick signing to a major label so soon after forming took away from the band's "childhood", Murphy said that it did, but that they did what they had to do.

"I think it hurt us in some ways. I'm glad we did what we did, I don't think we had any choice. I think bands now have

the choice. We didn't have any kind of support group that could have put out our record for us where now there's Murder and Cinnamon Toast and Sappy and No Records. So I don't think we really could have done it on our own."

While the band did release material on their own label, Murderecords, before signing with DGC, Murphy isn't sure how long they could have lasted without the major label support. DGC did a lot for Sloan, and Murphy says they put them in the position where they are now. Their reason for breaking with Geffen a few years ago was that the label didn't know what to do with the band as they progressed musically.

The band released their latest album — *One Chord to Another* — on Murder and it has already gone gold in this country. Now, they distribute their own records in their home country and get to "own Canada." The band gets money from their American record deal — on a subsidiary of Capitol Records called The Enclave — but gets all the money from their Canadian sales.

"So we don't make 80 cents a record — we make more like four dollars a record," explained Murphy.

He thinks more bands are owning their own labels these days, but it's more for reasons of finances than control of the art. Murphy explained that the recording process is more affordable now and most bands know how to make records.

"I'm sure they're interested in artist development, but it's more about...you make more money."

While Murphy acknowledges that the "glory days" of the Halifax Scene were in 1992 and 1993, he thinks that it's still pretty healthy. People just aren't as excited about bands getting signed. Local act Thrush Hermit was signed to the Elektra label last

year and Murphy says he can't wait to see what happens with the band, it's just that no one is talking about it.

"There's still lots of really cool things going on, it's just become less newsworthy; more run-of-the-mill."

According to Murphy, one of the benefits of the success of Halifax bands is that people now realize that you can record an album inexpensively and that you can have a little bit of a career instead of having to make it big or not.

"There's room for moderate success," said Murphy. "They say all the time in the States that there's no such thing as moderate success: you're either huge or your nothing. But I don't think that's exactly true. You can make a living at it."

Murphy agrees that they got an extra boost from being a Halifax band at the time when Halifax and Seattle were being compared.

"We really benefitted from that whole Nirvana thing. We got to be a local Nirvana. It was kind of a silly comparison on one hand, but we were definitely doing a Nirvana thing, too. But we were essentially trying to copy British bands more."

Previous to last spring's release of *One Chord to Another*, Sloan were reported to have broken up. Many thought it was simply a publicity stunt but Murphy says at that time the band did not exist.

"We were just getting tired of each other. I kind of take responsibility for it in some ways."

One of the problems was that Scott lived in Toronto. The band felt faced with the possibility of having to get a new drummer, which no one wanted. It was the surmounting of this problem which Murphy remembers as the turning point to getting the band back on its feet.

The three members in Halifax had been writing and came up with ten songs they liked when Scott sent down some of his own work.

"I was thinking either Andrew's going to send down pieces of shit or saboteur-type songs that he thinks would be really challenging to the band," said Murphy. "But he sent down 'A Side Wins' and '400 Metres' which I thought were awesome. And this is a sign that he still cares...that he doesn't hate us. I was psyched."

Each of the members of Sloan writes songs and sings lead. Murphy recognizes that this is a rare thing, but doesn't know why.

"Who wants to see one guy do everything? It seems like such an obvious choice: everybody should be the singer. I think that's more exciting. I think it makes us look cool that now all of us have singles."

In "The Lines You Amend", the band's latest video, the band heavily copies from the Beatles' early look. It's a great satirical response to the tiresome comparisons of Sloan to that group. Murphy said it's obvious that they're taking from the Beatles but that they're not going to change their style because of those comments.

In fact, he said, "I want to sound like Zeppelin now. Sometimes I feel like I've played a lot of pop music and I feel like, fuck, I want to play some rock music."

Murphy said that's it's too bad that the only venue for local groups is the Birdland Cabaret.

"I find it frustrating that the only place to play in town is Birdland," said Murphy. "I think the Birdland has done a great service. I'm just surprised that younger kids don't want to play somewhere else."

Murphy thinks the Birdland is too big to support a local scene and finds it more exciting to see a band somewhere small. He also

prefers to see bands and perform in front of an all ages crowd. Murphy thinks there's room for a smaller live venue but unfortunately, the only way money could be made is to make it a licensed venue.

Many of the fans of Sloan tend to copy their anti-rockstar image and dress somewhat sloppily, but in doing so, are following the band's lead as they would sharp-dressing rockstars.

"Sometimes I feel like I want to dress up," said Murphy. "I don't think that there's anything wrong with emulating a band that you like. I was heavily into Fugazi and Minor Threat and I would have done anything to be like them."

Murphy thinks his future, once Sloan has run its course, is to play in a Fleetwood Mac-style group with Matt Murphy from the Superfriendz and Jennifer Pierce from Jale. Murphy went to his high school prom with Pierce and all of them worked as porters at the Victoria General Hospital in Halifax about nine years ago.

The last show Sloan put on was during the On-Music Festival in a sardine-packed Birdland with a pretty crazy crowd that was hurling themselves around, throwing water bottles at the band and knocking mics over.

"We've played that kind of show before," said Murphy. "I like kind of tame chaos — I don't want anyone to get hurt — but I like when things go wrong, it kind of enhances the show. It's like, 'I saw this concert, and then I watched the hockey game, and then I had a bowl of tapioca pudding.' I'd rather it was like 'I saw the show and, holy crap, they had to call the riot police.'"

So if you want to see some great bands on Saturday, expect a chaotically good time. On the other hand, if you want to do the cocaine jock dance, Chris Murphy might laugh so hard that he'll fall off the stage.