



by B. Tude

Finally, the much anticipated release of Sloan's first full length album is upon us. *Smeared's* twelve songs are a representative sample of what has led such esteemed "local" papers like the *Kings' Watch* (in their UCC guide to Halifax music supplement) to declare Halifax the new music Mecca of North America. You may have read the *Fax* magazine review which compared songs on *Smeared* to the Rolling Stones and attempted to

draw comparisons with other fine local bands like Infradig. Hardly! But in this day and age, where Soundgarden gets played on Q104, I suppose one might get a bit confused. Sloan is comprised of Halifax natives Chris Murphy, the lead vocalist and bassist; Jay Ferguson, the lead guitarist and vocals; Patrick Pentland, guitar and vocals; and Andrew Scott on drums (and sometimes guitar and vocals, according to the liner notes). All the band members share in writing songs. The band first played at

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NSCAD in the spring of 1991, and first caught the eye of the major labels after performing at last year's East Coast Music Award showcases.

After courting several labels, Sloan signed to the David Geffen Company, which also has such powerhouses like Nirvana and Sonic Youth. *Smeared* follows on Sloan's first independent release, *Peppermint*. That

Sloan
Smeared
MCA/DGC

six song EP was released this summer, and while there is no doubting the quality of the music itself, the EP was unexplainably murky and even the CD sounded like a cheap tape with muted high end.

Despite slight overproduction on some songs, *Smeared* will stand out as one of 1992's foremost alternative albums. In fact, we may live to see *Smeared* become this year's cross-over/media hype hit like Nirvana was last summer.

The album opens with the song you love to hate, "Underwhelmed". This is in fact the "Mark Three" version of the song which first ap-

peared on CKDU's "Hear and Now", which came out last year. This is a great new version of the same old song, and brings to life a song I never thought I would dance to again. While this version will probably have people dancing all over North America by January, the question has to be asked, why were the first two versions so radically inferior to the final cut?

The songs "Raspberry" and "Median Strip" are solid demonstrations of lead singer Chris Murphy's intriguing lyrics and Sloan's characteristic wall of sound guitar work. The punchy guitar and catchy lyrics make the songs memorable and very "hummable". Jenny Pierce, formerly of the local band No Damn Fears and more recently of Tag accompanies Murphy on several tracks, adding her voice to "Marcus Said" and "I am the Cancer".

The album's diversity should surprise those who early wrote of Sloan by saying all their songs sound the same. The Generation X-esque rant of the aptly titled "Left of Centre" is amusing but pointed, and "Take it In" is simply a great song. My early opinion is that "Two Seater" is the

weakest song on the album.

The tunes which feature the lyric writing and vocal talents of the other members of the band really demonstrate the talent of the band as a whole. My favorite song off of *Peppermint* was "Sugertune", which is still one of my faves. The other song sung by Pentland, "500 Up", is one of my two favorites of the album. Ferguson sings on the ethereal and slightly corn "What's there to decide" and also on "Lemonzinger", my favorite song on the album. This is a song that needs to have a video made!!!

It's hard not to get warm and mush about the Sloan. They may be the first home town heroes to make it big, but somebody has got to be objective. The album IS GOOD, but I still maintain some reservations about the album's glossy, constructed sound. The persistent twin tracking of the vocals and slightly less than raw, and again, overproduced sound detracts from what are otherwise good songs with great lyrics. Don't get me wrong, this album is not one you should miss. But I don't think Sloan will be playing Lollapalooza, or at least, not this year....

Hear we are now... we're the Rankins

by Dana MacKenzie

That the audience stayed in their seats was truly a miracle. From the opening song, the Rankin Family

Band of Mabou, Cape Breton, had a capacity crowd at the Rebecca Cohn on Monday, October 5, dancing in their seats. The effect? Pure magic. One need not be of Celtic descent to appreciate the sincere and exuberant performance of the Rankin Family

Band. The Gaelic laments, the Irish love songs, and the Milling Frolic folk tunes are artfully arranged and performed by these musical jewels from the Highlands of Cape Breton. The group, however, does write and perform a lot of its own material. These too are eloquently executed, especially Jimmy Rankin's "Come Over the Hill" and "Orangedale Whistle". But the real spell-binding power of this band lies not only in their spirited and sometimes passionate performances. It is their voices themselves that are truly works of art: they possess not only a superlative melodic quality, but also an image-provoking capability that is unparalleled in modern music. The resonant and sometimes aria-like quality of several of their Gaelic renditions evoke immediate images of mist-covered glens and forsaken lovers. Undoubtedly, the Rankin Family are eastern Canada's consummate entertaining act. They sing, they dance, they laugh, and they welcome their audience into the warm heart of Celtic culture - and all without pretension or contrivance. If you are looking for real artists in this sometimes barren and artificial world. Or if you are wondering if the muses really do exist, then look no more. The Rankin Family Band is the real thing.

A POLK TALE

by Stan Beck

Somewhere in the grand continent of North America that I call my home lies a valley of earth and trees and people and stone. In the valley lies a field, flows a stream, blows the winds. But under the field, under the stream, under the earth of the valley lies a vein of coal, not rich enough to dig up and sell, but big enough to form the base and the bedrock we build on, and it's just below the surface.

And at some point, the old timers sit around a corner-store stove in the winter, say ninety-nine years ago, a bolt of lightning struck the earth, exposed the coal, set it on fire.

So it burns through the year, embers fed by caves that bring air they need to stay alight. It burns through the day, the earth warm from its heat, and the snow melts there before it does anywhere else. It burns through the night, and from the hills around the valley you can see it glowing red through the thin soil here by the school, and over there by the church.

Town fool said in forty-two it would burn underground for ninety-nine years and in the hundredth the earth would cave in and the flames would be fed by the open air and the valley would be destroyed. No one believed it then, no one believes it now - he was also the town drunk, and heard voices in the wind, and when the rain fell.

A committee was struck this year to try to flood the underground caves and put it out, environmental concerns and all that. Tight-assed townies squirting thousands of gallons of water down underground through holes they surveyed and enlarged.

Ninety-nine years it's been burning, they say, and through the day it burns, and in the night you can see its red glow.



Family photo

Warner: On magic and tradition

by Geoffrey Ineson

Don Warner, a Dal graduate, who's been away from leading a band for many years, is returning with a blockbuster big band concert at Rebecca Cohn Auditorium, Tuesday, November 3rd at 8:00 pm.

Billed as "Don Warner Presents a Canadian All-Star Big Band", it is truly that, with such major jazz stars from Toronto as Guido Basso, Sam Noto and Arnie Chycoski, on trumpets; Rick Wilkins, Ed Graf and Dave Caldwell on sax; and the exciting drummer, Marty Morell.

I had a chance to interview Don Warner about some of the head work that's been involved in getting this gig together...

As a graduate, what are some of your fondest memories of Dalhousie?

It was a great experience to get a degree here. Although, in a way, I was the world's worst student. I wasn't rigorous enough for total academia; I wasn't fooling with it, I did do it, but I realized that there was no point to study that hard. I looked sort of frivolous sitting in class with dark glasses after playing a gig the night before. One year I would take just one course, then a year off, then two the next... I had used to joke that I was here under five different presidents. I was in Dal before I went into the air force, and about seven different times after the war.

What sort of preparations have been at the forefront to the performance?

I live very privately nowadays. So when I clamber onto the stage there's a contrast there which people don't understand. It'll be interesting in the first two minutes to see if my instincts are still good or not - I may have to do some wild compensation. But they're (the musicians) all such sharp readers, they'll understand the notation that I'll be giving them: the markings will tell them all. And particularly these guys, they've read everything under the sun, so really, I don't anticipate any problems. My job in getting the thing rehearsed is to keep everybody looking for the end, keep them focused. My job mainly is to know the charts thoroughly, to know the arrangements, I mean they've been trickling in for six months and I think I do know them thoroughly so the thing will be to translate that very quickly from the rehearsal to the stage. Also to know the cues, who is coming in at a certain spot, or who is to play a little longer - a hand signal, that, if he is really hot, he can keep going.

I've read some of the press releases and I was wondering what influence would the over-all performance have from the structures of the original compositions?

Even though we are using charts and arrangements, to get a richer sound, you can't get the rich sound you can get with orchestrations without an arranger writing them. Musicians like myself value the orchestrations of having two or three trumpets, or in this case five trumpets, a couple of trombones and a bass trombone way down deep. You see, you just can't get sixteen guys on stage - it's mayhem to do it without some notation, some orchestration. Allot of people don't understand the value of that. But there's no possibility of showing off what we have in that band without arrangements.

Does your approach to Jazz arrangements give any resemblance to, say, the more formal aspect or classic style of Jazz?

Well, some people get choked up at the word arrangements. It sounds



Scoob de boo wah bah - Yeah.

PHOTO: A. IRWIN

Well, anyone who went and played a concert of completely notated music, would not be playing out what Jazz is all about, which is improvisation. You see, notated music can really urge an improviser to do things, give him an exciting kind of background, take him in different directions, can give him a tonal palate for an improviser to play upon, and he'll get new ideas when he hears a certain kind of shot - as we call them sometimes - from the band and they will play a big cluster of chords which might be ten notes thick and that will evoke ideas in an improviser, if he's any good, he'll fill in different tambours and textures. But that's the advantage of the big band: you've got the soloist, you've got the background, and you have the focus of where the writer is taking the chart. But we don't see that as such a limiting thing as some people say of orchestration; that it is dominating the

band which will be consistent and hopefully sort of congenial with what the guy has been playing. It only limits him some what, though it can also inspire him. So there is a paradox there as to just what happens. Out of this two-pronged thing should come a synthesis of something really musical. I mean, that is the ideal.

Is the Jazz culture of today displaced somewhat in the, or by the nineties modes or conventions of popular music?

Most do think that their culture is quite different. But there are threads through cultures, and one of the threads, of course, that I'm interested in is Jazz and big bands, which is not dead at all. I would think that ninety per cent of any young people who went over there would firstly be amazed that it's not an old man's band and were not a bunch of droopy-ass old musicians trying to be nostal-

We're doing it because we believe in the music, and I believe in these guys that are coming in and apparently they have trust in me... it's a hell of a lot of trust too, which does flatter me and I feel grateful because these guys, the ten that are coming in, they might say I have some credibility, but they don't really know what I'm going to give them in terms

"...a synthesis of something really musical."

of the music. Some of them have an idea because we tailor-made some of the orchestrations to suit certain guys and what they would like to do. And that is what's going to happen Monday: vital, energetic music which really descends, and is not a nostalgic trip back to the past but is going to take the best and bring it up to date.

What in particular has your role been in the selection of the work?

My role is to have made a program that will make these ten guys excited. There's a great act of faith there. Mine isn't so much, because I know what they can do. It's an act of faith for them to me which I'm going to have to justify. But we've prepared it very carefully, it has been prepared for ten months. It took me a couple of months to decide what kinds of tunes and what approach I would take. In June, I decided to make the performance more accessible to the general public than I had first conceived it, a bit more accessible without compromising, without jeopardizing all the artistic side that we thought we had under our belts. I just decided to make it a bit more melodic, a bit more lyrical a concert than I had been going to do.

I understand that the list of songs has changed once or twice previous to a final draft. Could you elaborate on the decision to change the selections?

If you invite a thousand people to come and pay twenty-three bucks, in my opinion you have a debt to them. You just can't thumb your nose at them and just do something that is way beyond them or that's not related to their culture. And I have no reason to think that there are that many Jazz fans, pure and simple in Halifax, I know there aren't. So I had to realize that the audience would be a lot of people going out of curiosity. People who never perhaps have listened to Jazz seriously, but their hopes will be that I will do something that they can latch on to.

Special mention to TJ's kid sister & Arnie

A paradox, perhaps?

Yes. Total freedom results in not very much: garbage most of the time. And total discipline results in doldrum: it's pretty boring and it's very stiff, organized and preconceived. But there's some kind of magic; you ask most painters and most novelists - that are worth anything they have all gone through that agonizing dilemma of freedom and discipline. And I think that is what a Jazz band goes through - a big one - because you don't want to have some overly notated spaces, you need some holes and some spaces. So the guys who write for me know that and so our orchestrations are full of lots of spaces. You know, suddenly there would be a gigantic little motif from

performance, dominating the soloist: that he can't escape it. And to a point that's true, but it's that old business of freedom and discipline, a philosophical problem.

There are allot of people who just like the music to read the sports page to. Does it, or did it ever become discouraging to assemble a big band in the nineties? I mean in particular, in the face of techno pop?

Would you say a well notated background gives a better frame for improvisation?