

# ENTERTAINMENT

...music...films...exhibitions...theatre...arts...

## The day the music died (aka 'Last show of the season')

Rusty, Sandbox and Big Sugar wrapped up UNB's strong semester of rock music last Wednesday evening — and it wasn't a bad finish

### SANDBOX

I am really against the idea of the federal government banning cigarette companies from sponsoring arts events, but if companies such as Belvedere keep sponsoring bands like Sandbox my opinion will quickly change. In what has to have been the most uninspired performance this year, Sandbox nearly bored to tears. Musically, the band's performance was mediocre. They were able to recreate their light weight rock tunes faithfully, but it lacked intensity and certainly would not inspire anyone to rush out and buy their album. Even worse was their stage presence. Other than the bass player, no one in the band seemed to get into the music, and the lead singer's attempts to work the crowd were feeble. Belvedere could have put five mannequins on the stage and played the Sandbox cd and it would have been just as enjoyable. Overall, Sandbox's performance was terrible. People who like the band may have enjoyed it, but for the amount of energy the band put into the performance, one would be just better off listening to their CD.



GET IT? Rusty's Ken MacNeil loves his fans.

### RUSTY

Rusty not only told the crowd to go to hell, but they gave them instructions on how to get there. First of all, starting off the night instead of Sandbox was disappointing enough; unlike Sandbox, Rusty came prepared with brand new material in the form of their hard core rock album, *Sophomore*. But, the audience — or those on hand that early in the evening — didn't seem to acknowledge that.

After Ken MacNeil wailed out the lyrics to *Sophomore*'s opening track, "Doin' Fine," the audience began their chant for Big Sugar. But MacNeil and co. told the crowd where to go. "Fuck you, mutha fucka!" MacNeil yelled. Pure rock attitude from a band that believes they're the essence of pure rock — very fitting. Taken aback, the few hecklers hurled back insults, but bassist Jim Moore tossed back comments about their mothers to shut them up.

Aside from the exchange of phrases, Rusty also unleashed their lyrics on the small, but steadily building audience. From *Sophomore*, guitarist Scott McCullough tore through MacNeil wailed out "Oh No Joe," "Star" and "Friends," while MacNeil wailed out the unfamiliar words.

But it was the tunes from *Finke* that sparked the audience's recognition of Rusty. They woke up to "Wake Me" and nodded acknowledgement to "Misogony" and "California." However, Rusty still weren't happy. "C'mon, Fredericton, move!" MacNeil shouted several times, swearing all the while. Summarizing Rusty's performance, Moore jammed his bass through the cafeteria ceiling, appearing to do so as an obligatory act, not because the crowd influenced him.

The evening's opening slot — what with the sparse crowd and lack of audience energy — just wasn't suited for Rusty. They did their job, warming up the fans for Sandbox and Big Sugar, but the kids weren't "Groovy Dead" — they were just dead.

In retrospect, it was unfortunate that Rusty wasn't the second act on stage. Their energy would have proven pretty entertaining, given the proper conditions.

• PETER J. CULLEN



Sandbox's Sandbox. They tend pretty poorly.



Here's how much it's worth: Kelly's House.

### BIG SUGAR

UNB students were tated to a preview of Sundays' Bob Dylan concert when Gordie Johnson and Big Sugar visited the SUB cafeteria last Wednesday night. No, Dylan wasn't there, and no Dylan tunes were played, but just like, Dylan, the lead singer's voice was shot.

Actually, that's a bit harsh. Johnson's voice has not gone completely south à la Dylan, but the top register of his voice is gone. There had been signs of this when he played *The Dock* last term, but the fact that he cranked it up for "Wild Ox Moan" near the end of the show convinced this drunken sot that it was just a temporary aberration caused by an arduous touring schedule in smoky dives such as *The Dock*.

Unfortunately, for this hypothesis, Gordie's voice proved completely unable to handle "Sugar in My Coffee" during last week's show. This was especially disturbing when it was realized that this was only the fourth song of their night. This tune requires several jumps to a painfully high octave, all of which were attempted, and none of which were satisfactorily reached, the best that Gordie could produce was a weak crack in his voice. At worst, he would let out with only a slight creak, once even giving in to reality and re-singing a line at a more normal, and lower, register.

All of this brings to question the real state of Gordie Johnson's voice. While he is justly recognised as a guitar hero, his vocals have not before this been a cause for embarrassment. Maybe Big Sugar fans might have to resign themselves to an admission that this band might now have become primarily a studio band where Gordie can pamper his throat and voice, with only a partial performance to be seen in concert. That would be a real shame, as Big Sugar is a band whose tight rawness is best experienced live. It would be nice to blame his voice on the tour schedule, but as it had been just the second night of their Belvedere Promotes Lung Cancer eastern tour, this excuse seems particularly unsatisfying.

So the show sucked, right? Maybe Big Sugar should have just hauled themselves off the stage and let Rusty come back out and put on a real show? Not in a million years or a second. While the vocal problems were a disappointment and the aural experience was lessened by the absence of the dichotomy of Gordie's high register and his pounding guitar, the truth is that the point of a Big Sugar show is not Gordie's voice. In fact, Gordie's singing is third on a list of priorities for the band.

First and foremost is the music. Gordie's guitar playing remains aggressively powerful and raw, and it remains perfectly complemented by the harp of Kelly Hoppe, as is best seen in their video, "Diggin' A Hole." Kelly seems to have put his sax on the shelf, at least for the *Hemi-Vision* CD. About the only time it played a significant role at the show was for "I'm a Ram," the signature song released on *500 Pounds*.

The only other major play it came out for was the always disappointing "AAA Aardvark Hotel," with which they ended their concert and the night on a profoundly unsatisfying note, actually chasing some of the assembled throng from the room.

The second most important item in the Big Sugar repertoire is looking cool. They remain the only band, to my knowledge, that has a sponsorship from Hugo Boss. And, of course, one of the highlights of their show at *The Dock* last term was when Gordie paused in the middle of a harp solo to comb back his heavily greased hair. Complementing Gordie is the coke bottle glasses and fedora of Kelly Hoppe and the total package of Garry Lowe, the coolest looking bass player on the planet. They used to be perfectly capped by drummer Stich Winston, who was just plain old weird looking, but his death caused Big Sugar to recruit Paul Brennan from Odds. Brennan seemed lacking a bit of the Big Sugar distinction when they came through last fall, but this time around he did manage to successfully establish his own identity on stage.

According to Gordie, the band's visual image is definitely something of which he is conscious. "Image is more than half of it," he said, referring to the band's focus. "People see a poster, they see your album cover. You'll notice they don't put CDs in just clear plastic blank covers. So, that sticks in their mind, what they see. Their first impression of you is a visual impression when they see you on stage or see your videos. Videos are an important medium for promotion these days because visual is, I think, more than half of what it is."

At present, Big Sugar is looking to get their latest CD, *Hemi-Vision*, some exposure in the US and in Europe. To this end, they will be getting some MTV play commencing in April. They will also begin an extensive tour schedule once their present Belvedere tour comes to a close. This tour of the States will also see them visiting England for about a week. Their last venture to Europe was not successful: "It was kind of weird," commented Gordie with a laugh. "We had a record label that billed us like a traditional blues act, so when we got there, what they were told they were going to see and what they saw was not the same thing. We were sort of hated."

The way Gordie would like to see Big Sugar billed is as a rock and roll band, not as a blues band. So, while he is not so much trying to get out of the blues section in the record stores, he is very much in hopes of getting put into the pop or rock section. "I think having your records only in the blues section limits you," he observed, "because most people don't look there, and if they heard us on the radio they wouldn't look for us there."

A few years back, however, when Big Sugar visited the UNB campus for the Harvest Jazz & Blues Festival and then again in promotion of *500 Pounds*, Gordie talked of Big Sugar very much in terms of the blues tradition. He spoke then of wanting to try new things but also of revering the names and talents of such traditional bluesmen as B. B. King and Muddy Waters. He now seems willing to give a freer rein to the musical interests of the ragga influences within the band, and to get away from a truer love for the blues, in the hope of improving their marketability and thus their earning power. To some, this might sound like selling out, but to others it might not be considered a bad thing if, on their next visit to Fredericton, Big Sugar did not play *The Dock* or the SUB cafeteria, but instead played the Aitken Centre. Certainly Gordie Johnson and Big Sugar would like to see it happen.

• MARK SJOVE



- UNB Art Centre presents *The Human Form: Gestures of Songs and Sorrow* (drawings and monoprints) by Montreal artists. April 6 - May 4/97. Also a slide/lecture by Evan Penny. Friday, April 18, 12:15 pm. FREE
- Gallery Connexion presents photographs by members of Toronto's Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography. April 4 - May 2/97. 454-1433.
- Gallery 78 presents "Carscapes" ("landscape painting fused with images of discarded automobile") by Saint John artist Glenn Hall. Reception to meet the artist on Saturday, April 5 - 19, 2-4 pm. 454-5192.
- Beaverbrook Art Gallery presents Saint John artist Herzl Kashetsky's "A Prayer for the Dead." On display until May 11. For more information contact Caroline Walker, 458-2074.
- Capital Film Society presents *Beautiful Thing* at Tilley Hall 102. March 31, 8 pm. \$3 members, \$5 non-members.
- UNB/STU Creative Arts presents Duo New Brunswick, Wendy Nielson and Sally

- Wright in concert at Memorial Hall. Sunday, April 6, 8 pm. \$18 adults, \$10 students.
  - Joe Blades presents River Readings at Molly's Coffee House. Fredericton poets Deborah Stiles, Murray Sutcliffe and Andy Weaver read on Sunday, April 13 at 8 pm. FREE. 454-5127.
  - The League of Canadian Poets WRITES OF SPRING 1997 featuring eight NB and PEI poets. At Gallery Connexion. Wednesday, April 23 at 8 pm. FREE. 454-5127.
  - New Brunswick Museum presents *Jewels of France* at Market Square in Saint John. Now - Apr 30/97. Also *Folk Art, Transitions: The Paintings of Peggy Smith, Peter Powning, Elemental Clay and Glass, and Egg-stravaganza* now on display. (506) 643-2300.
- If you have an event you would like to publicize, send all relevant info to "Know Where To Go?" c/o *The Brunswickan*. Submissions can be sent via fax (453-4958), or by e-mail (brun@unb.ca). Or simply drop off your information at *The Brunswickan* office, located at Room 35 in the SUB.



PHOTOS BY DREW GUERRE



Big Sugar's Garry Lowe.

### WINNERS!!!

The Big Sugar album winners are:  
Becky DeLong  
Paul Duffy  
Jason Jeandron  
(Everyone's answer was *500 Pounds*.)

The Rusty prize pack winners are:  
Bill Holton  
Jennifer Ross  
Chris Fisher  
(Rusty's new single is "Empty Cell.")

Stop by *The Brunswickan*, room 35 in the SUB, to pick up your prizes.

## Who knows what lurks in the Sandbox?

ANTHONY DAVIS  
*THE BRUNSWICKIAN*

This summer Sandbox will release the follow-up to their smash debut album, *Bionic*. The new album, which is to be recorded over May and June, should hit the stores by mid-summer. The New Glasgow, Nova Scotia rockers are set to head down to New Jersey to record with producer Don Fleming (Stone Temple Pilots, Hole, Teenage Fanclub). "We've been doing pre-production since November," says Mike Smith, one of the band's two guitarists. "We've got a lot of songs. We just have got to start whittling it down." As people at the show may have noticed, the band chose to perform only a few songs from their first album. Smith et al. (singer Paul Murray, guitarist Jason Archibald and drummer Troy Shanks) are using this tour as

fine tuning for heading into the studio. "We had no intention of doing a tour," comments Murray on how the tour came about, "or at least in Canada. But then we just thought, 'What better way to practice the songs than by doing a tour?'" It surprised many people that the band would hook up for such a major tour without a new album to support. "We were contacted by our agency and Belvedere about opening up for Big Sugar, and we decided to say 'yes.'" It is a testament of the success of the band's first album that they were the middle band on the bill, and that Rusty, who have just released their second album, were the openers. The band has enjoyed similar success across the country, which the band attributes to video and radio play, or as Mike puts it, "we just didn't take it seriously. That, and the fact that 'Curious'

— our first song that we ever released to anybody in the world — was number 21 in Canada, and number nine on MuchMusic. ... And we headlined our first tour.

"It's whatever happens. It's just a lucky thing, if they decided to play it," is how Smith feels about a video being picked up by MuchMusic. The band definitely feels that they owe a lot of their 'recognition' to MuchMusic. Says Murray, "We can show up in, say Kamloops, BC, and have an instant crowd."

As for what people can expect on the new album, Murray says, "We're going to try to have variety like the last album, and not centre it all on one style. ... We don't want to put ourselves in a corner and call ourselves a grunge band or an acoustic band, but it's nice to have both. Maybe not so much grunge, but some 'heavy.'"