



## “Making it” as a musician on Canada’s East Coast

*Ian Janes discusses the dark side of music marketing*

BY KARAN SHETTY

What does it take to “make it” as a musician on Canada’s East Coast? Is it even possible if you’re not a virtuoso fiddler or some other Celtic artist? Who better to answer these questions than someone facing the struggle himself.

Ian Janes is a musician from the small town of Hantsport, NS who has been active in the Halifax music scene for a number of years. His debut album, *Occasional Crush*, skilfully blends pop and R&B, and is the culmination of months of hard studio work with some of the top session players from around the province.

Last Wednesday, at an album release party at Neptune’s Du Maurier Theatre, Janes electrified the capacity crowd with six tunes from his disc. In attendance were many members of the Halifax music community who lauded the performance with a ten-minute standing ovation.

As a 21-year-old talent with a CD already under his belt, Janes is clearly an artist on the rise. He does not shy away from hard work and approaches the tiresome life of constant touring and performing with a zeal and vigour that sets him apart from others already on the scene.

I had a chance to chat with the musician shortly after his Halifax release party to ask him about his views on “the biz” and his plans for the future.

For a person with his whole future ahead of him, Janes is remarkably composed. He has the air of an old pro who’s been interviewed a million times before.

Asked whether it’s possible for an artist to become internationally, or even nationally, famous in the local music environment, Janes responds with a mix of optimism and scepticism.

“Some people have had some pretty big hits, like Anne Murray and the Rankins, but that music is what people expect to hear from the Maritimes,” Janes said. “What’s happened to Maritime music is like what’s happened to alternative music. The label has become a noun instead of an adjective. I’m going to try it for a little while here anyway. The people out here listen to stuff other than Maritime music.”

Others artists, however, aren’t as patient with Halifax. But Janes believes the city’s reputation as an thriving music industry is not all hype.

“There’s a lot of good music here. It’s

been pretty divided at times with the alternative scene and the Celtic scene and so on. Contrary to popular belief though, there’s always been a great R&B scene — white, black and sometimes mixed — but it stayed mostly underground until the music industry started picking up out here.”

In the world of music videos and image marketing, artists on the East Coast are facing the same problems as their fellow musicians across the world. Without any marketable qualities like good looks or even gimmicks like scars or pierced nipples, it is becoming increasingly hard for artists to make a living. Even artists who are not renowned for their looks are not even close to being ugly (with a few exceptions of course). Janes believes, however, that technology has caught up to and even surpassed humanity’s obsession with image. In an age of airbrushing, plastic surgery, make-up, fancy camera work and clever marketing, success is within anyone’s grasp.

“With the right stylist and the wrong motivation, you can sell anyone,” quips Janes. “People, like that rapper Fat Joe, who aren’t necessarily good looking but have ‘that look’ are successful because they are shrewdly marketed. If they were sitting around in sweat pants, with shirts that only came down to their navel and their gut hanging

than average looking women in the public eye.”

What is the lowest common denominator for success, then — motivation, talent or marketing? There doesn’t seem to be one aspect of the business which precludes the other two. It is necessary to have a mix of all three, with talent perhaps being the ingredient which is most often left out of the recipe.

“You have to have the motivation to get to a place where someone can market you,” says

Janes. “After that it seems like you have to tell people what to buy and then sell it to them. Sometimes the entertainment industry works that way and that’s unfortunate. It’s hard to say whether the public really

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likes that music. It seems like we’re told to like a certain type of thing by the media and now our media has become our culture.”

For an optimist, Janes has no misconceptions about how tough it is to be successful. Although he has lofty ambitions, he says he would rather be moderately successful than risk his happiness by moving to a larger urban centre.

He expects to sell a few thousand copies of his album in the Maritimes and will have his own showcase at the East Coast Music Awards in St. John’s this February. Although he is proud of his debut effort, Janes knows that first albums are more of an industry calling card than anything else. He says he will have higher expectations for his sophomore album, which he expects will take a year or more to release.

But considering the positive reception to his first album, I would be fortunate (and a little surprised) if Ian Janes would have the time to grant an interview to a small-time journalist like myself a year from now. *Rolling Stone* and *Spin* would probably want to get their hands on him first.

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out, it would be a different story.

“The world’s always harder on female artists though. On the R&B and rap scene, other than Missy Elliott, they’re all really, really, really nice looking. There’s definitely more average looking men

