

AN IN DEPTH LOOK INTO THE ECMAS

Loco-what? The cigarette-sponsored ceilidh

BY DAVE MACDONALD

A Celtic party at the VIA Rail Train Station on a Friday night? Who would put it on and how would it turn out? Yes... a ceilidh at a train station, put on by some cigarette company featuring Fine Crowd, Kilt, and Rawlins Cross.

Fine Crowd came on first and got the crowd moving. This band is definitely not short on talent. Besides the fact that all four of them can push out good vocals, they can each play the other's instruments.

Lead singer, Fred Jorgensen, has a very thick, almost Irish, accent which adds colour to the already amazing music. Their style is unique and could very well have come from the highlands of Ireland rather than St. John's.

Next, Kilt took the spotlight.

These guys can dance, sing and make a hyper crowd go crazy. They had everyone at the station, the "Kilt Army", screaming and dancing. Their energy was backed by musical ability, and it made for an amazing set.

Finally, the big boys got on stage, Rawlins Cross. They opened with a slow but extremely beautiful tune called "MacPherson's Lament" which calmed everyone down, but when Ian McKinnon released his bagpipes, there was a hearty roar from the crowd. From then on, they alternated between quick and slow songs that kept people dancing and singing for the duration of the show.



Right: Rawlin's Cross rocked LocoFest on the first day of the festival (Photo by Lisa Verge)

A harrowing weekend of death and rebirth

An alternative view of ECMA weekend

BY JOHN CULLEN

Wednesday's noon hour was a rainy one. The front of the SUB was looking average in its own pathetic way. I was crushing out my eighth cigarette of the day when I heard my name called from the street. I looked around expecting to see a friend, but the boulevard was empty, save for a nineteenth century-style horse and carriage.

"John," the voice confirmed, "I have something for you."

Now I was afraid. It's not every day that the normal hustle and bustle of a university campus disappears in the blink of an eye and gets replaced by a historic vehicle exuding ominous vibes.

"Note to self," I muttered. "Make

an appointment for a stress test. This job might be affecting my brain."

The carriage called again. I had to find out what was inside. So, with reckless abandon, I entered through the open and beckoning compartment door.

Two caricatures greeted me. One fat daddy was cooking pasta in a vat of tomatoes, basil and boiling water. The other was your typical circus freak midget. He was obviously in charge of the horse and the sweating Italian.

"John, Jean Carlo my name is, and this large man to your right is my confidant and cook, Monsieur Bonaventura," said the midget in a monotone which crushed my hopes of guessing his age and birthplace.

"You like-a da musico, boy?" queried the cook.

"Sure. I love it," I replied.

"You think-a you can do something for my midget friend and me?" Bonaventura asked.

I was expecting this question. In the movies, encounters like this require a mystical character asking a hero for a favour to further a diabolical scheme. I understood the nuances, and accepted the role these two were forcing me to play — the tough ass.

"Depends," I replied.

"Mr. Cullen, it's very simple. We will give you the power to enter any bar in the city, as long as you report to us the type and quality of music you hear inside," stated Jean Carlo.

"What about expenses?"

"Don't-a worry. We'll take-a care of you," assured the cook.

"Yes," added the midget, "with these passes, you'll be hassle-free. You will maneuver with cat-like prowess from bar to bar."

I was not especially impressed. It's not hard to dupe the bouncers in a bar. Anyone can waltz in and say they're there to write about the band.

"But what about other expenses, namely liquor?"

"We can help you out," said the midget, handing me two crisp \$100 bills.

"If you expect me to go five days with only \$200, you'd better find some first-year slack-jaw. I need double that," I lied. Two hundred was enough, but heroes drive hard bargains.

"What? Are you tryin' to bust-a my balls? Jean Carlo, this punk's tryin' to bust our balls," said the cook, holding his stirring spoon dangerously close to my unprotected neck.

"Give him the money he asks for, Bonaventura," replied the freak.

The deal was made, and the cook opened the door. We were at my apartment. I didn't know that the carriage had moved.

After making a large purchase of drugs, I hit the Grawood for Open Mic Night. It was a battle of the bands that lured me to the Grawood, and it was the same battle of the bands which drove me out.

Outside, I spotted the carriage half hidden behind a large building. The street was eerily silent, the trees afraid to rustle their leaves.

I neared the vehicle with a lump of steel firmly lodged in my throat.

"What have you to say about the skirmish of musicians?" asked circus man.

I was too nervous and too drunk to speak coherently. I opted to mumble, and handed the cook my notes on the evening.

"...crowd young and alternative in a campy, Wal-Mart kinda way...wearing obligatory cheesy clothing: stupid hats and shirts with stupid slogans...second band doesn't embrace the fact that punk uses the same chords as blues. Bricklayer's punk: boring and mechanical...they're trying to say something witty/provocative, but the mics aren't loud enough, and that's good...thank God Nathan's Flat has a sex symbol for a vocalist, 'cause these days their brand of boring, rehashed pseudo-earnest 'alternative candy' needs one..." he read.

"If my momma heard me talk-a like this, she'd kick my ass," said the cook.

"Quiet," replied the midget. "This is exactly what we want — uncensored honesty. Let the man rant on."

"Thank you," I slurred.

"Your next assignment will be Festival ECMA. Here is your pass," he said, oddly enough while handing me a pass.

And with that, I was kicked out of the rolling carriage into the gutter in front of my apartment.

I needed sleep. My mind had been twisted by listening to a bunch of garage bands using up their fifteen minutes of fame too early in life.

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Halifax music suffers from Yellow Fever

BY RYAN LASH

After wallowing in ECMA musical sludge for four days I was starting to wonder if there were any musicians worthy of recognition. After the 76 Hour Jam, the Festival ECMA and the Gala Awards show (starring Rick Mercer, Great Big Sea, Ashley MacIsaac, Great Big Sea, Sarah McLachlan's giant talking head and Great Big Sea) I was starting to get a little down on the whole Halifax music scene. Thankfully, there were a couple of shows that restored my faith in this quaint little Atlantic city.

Saturday night marked the launch of Stardust Records — Halifax's newest label — at Music East's new all-ages venue, the old Olympic Bingo Hall. Featuring 15 bands from the label's new compilation CD (including Rebecca West, The Holiday Snaps, Julie Doiron and Plumtree), the show was a nice reminder that there are still a few bands around to fill in the gaps left by Sloan and the Super Friendz.

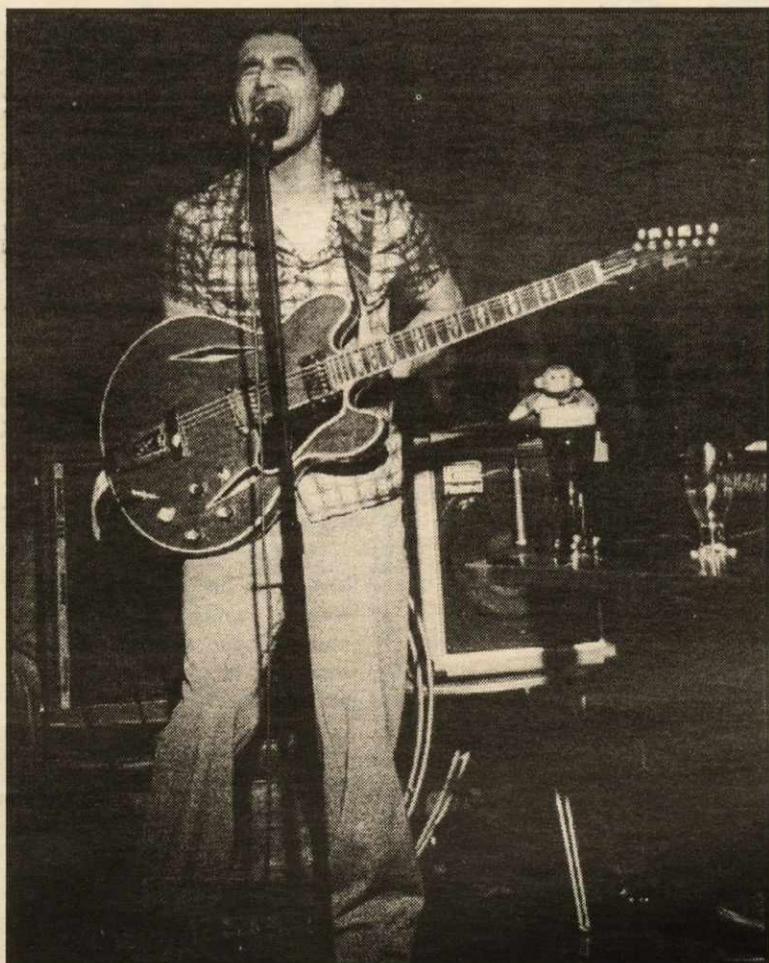
The new venue will help ensure that there are still a few places for these bands to play; and its location on the corner of Hunter and Cunard streets is hopefully far enough from

Barrington Gate Apartments to make sure that it will be around for a while. The old bingo hall can also fill in the gap left by the demise of Cafe Olé, as its layout accommodated both the drinkers and the ten-year-olds.

The other pleasant surprise of the weekend was the show on Sunday night at the Market St. Jazz Cafe. Right after the ECMA awards ceremony, while everyone who mistakenly thought they were anyone was savouring self-congratulatory drink at the post-show party, I was savouring a performance by Dr. Yellow Fever and the Jive.

Originally a bedroom project of Kamran Abdi (Dr. Yellow Fever, formerly of PF Station and Three Penny Opera), he put the band together just over two weeks ago for live performances; and now with a CD coming out in mid February, he's looking to share his yellow fever with us all.

The performance was a little fresh and a lot funky and saw the band move through original work, and a Michael Jackson cover. While they do sound a little like Jamiroquai, at least they're not Celtic fiddlers; and that means they're in a position to add much needed diversity to the Halifax music scene.



Kamran Abdi (a.k.a. Dr. Yellow Fever) belts out a tune at Market St. on Sunday. (Photo by Ryan Lash)