

## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

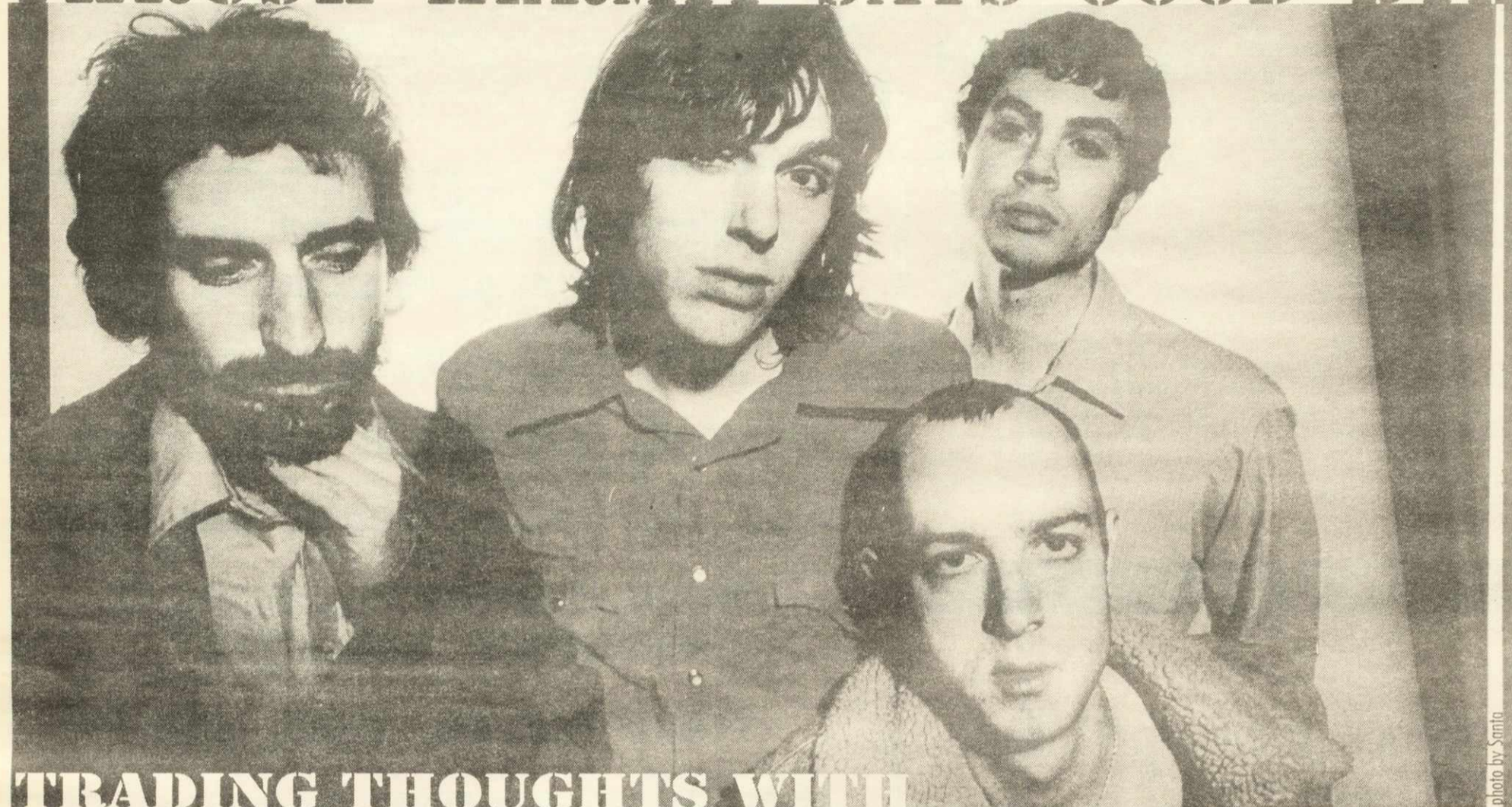
THE END OF AN INDY-ROCK ERA  
THRUSH HERMIT SAYS GOOD-BYE

photo by Smith

TRADING THOUGHTS WITH  
IAN MCGETTIGAN AND JOEL PLASKETT OF THRUSH HERMIT

BY JON ELMER

When Thrush Hermit began, *Growing Pains* was a primetime show, Allan Bester was in net for the Leafs and the Cold War was still being perceived by the west.

"When we started to play shows downtown, we were really young. We started playing Two-Buck Tuesdays at Club Flamingo, and you had to play two sets — an all ages afternoon show and a bar set. We were so young our parents had to come to the bar sets," said frontman Joel Plaskett, who along with bassist Ian McGettigan and guitar player Rob Benvie made up the nucleus of the band. Although they had numerous drummers along the way, they landed full-timer Cliff Glibb as the band was getting established in the Halifax-pop scene in the early 90s.

A lot has changed in the 11 years since Thrush Hermit began playing together as a band. Perhaps the most relevant change is the collapse of the indie-pop scene that put Halifax on the Canadian music map, when bands like Thrush Hermit, The Superfriendz and Sloan erased the stigma's that Rita McNeil and Anne Murray so graciously stuck on

the maritime music world. With, as Plaskett said, sonic similarities, the bands were elevated by the community feel of the East Coast scene, turning the focus of the Canadian indie-rock scene directly onto Halifax.

"It was good while it lasted, but eventually it had to end. Once you get past the similarities of the bands, you start to want to carve your own, you want to separate yourselves from it. But it was definitely exciting while it lasted," Plaskett reminisced of the Halifax pop-explosion over espresso at The Mokka Café.

And who knows, with a couple of breaks here and there, it could just as easily have been Thrush Hermit that took the game to the next level, instead of Sloan.

"They're good," said Plaskett of Sloan. "They were definitely influential, I'm not going to deny that. But we influenced them as well. Or at least we kicked their ass a few times."

With a pair of widely successful and notably talented EP's on murderecs — *Smart Bomb* (1993) and *Great Pacific Ocean* (1994) — as well as a few cross-Canada tours, the Hermit indeed appeared to be on to something big

when Elektra inked the boys to a major-label deal. Fresh out of high-school, the boys shortly began to record the band's first full-length, *Sweet Homewrecker* in 1996.

But it simply wasn't to be for the band. Elektra was too busy pushing Simply Red and Better Than Ezra to worry about a rock band from Nova Scotia, and they virtually ignored their newest signees. The debacle had a decidedly negative effect on the band, since Elektra wouldn't even give

was out of bounds, but we threw that in the trash when we did *Clayton Park*. We threw just about everything and the kitchen sink on [the album], because we just wanted to have fun," said Plaskett almost instinctively.

"We didn't need to make that record for anybody else," adds McGettigan. "There were no commercial aspirations for it."

A psychology that Plaskett agrees with: "Because we didn't give a shit, it turned out better. It

strong record with *Clayton Park* and so, sensing everyone wasn't quite so jazzed on making another, would it just suffer as a result? If you fake it, everyone's going to see."

So wanting to avoid the inevitable decline of a band that is founded on excitement, energy and enthusiasm, the Hermit decided to exit the rock game on a high note, a point of enlightenment that many bands could benefit from.

But it would seem that this isn't so much the end of the story, but rather the end of a chapter. For anyone that hasn't seen Plaskett perform in his new solo role, it's about time.

He describes the transition that will become his focus after Thrush Hermit's final tour, which officially got off the ground this week in Toronto.

"Thrush Hermit's a rock band and the only way you can be a good rock band is to play together for a long time. I'm not going to recreate that hard rock sound. I'm not going to do it the same way, I'm going to keep it more close to the chest."

An ideal that he has kept true to in the early part of his solo project with catchy folk-rock songs with exceptional lyrical foundation.

McGettigan leans forward anticipating my direction of the same question to him, "my next project," he says looking for the right wording "will be Ian synthesized purely into one project — all of Ian."

"Exhibitionist Ian" pipes in Joel. Thrush Hermit, as a whole, have an undeniable flare, and have certainly succeeded in their goal of carving their own niche in the indie-rock world.

When Thrush Hermit take the stage for the last time on Saturday, December 11 at the Marquee, it will mark the end of era, for not only the Halifax rock community, but the Canadian scene as well.



photo by Jon Elmer

Hanging from the rafters in the name of Rock 'n Roll.

Warner (who handled the Canadian side of Elektra) money for a video.

Ian McGettigan laughs about the Elektra days. "In hindsight, we were 19 year-old kids telling a record company how their record is going to sound."

"I can't believe someone didn't kick our asses," Joel chimes in, shaking his head.

One can't help but think that it was in fact Elektra that were kicking their own asses, when barely a year later Thrush Hermit released *Clayton Park*, signing with Canadian indie-rock goliaths Sonic Unyon. Quashing the more refined sound that the band put forth on *Sweet Homewrecker*, *Clayton Park* was a whole new world for the band.

"For *Sweet Homewrecker*, we had a really refined sense of what

always does when you do it like that."

The rockin' goodness of *Clayton Park* is undeniable: loose, loud, wild, varied, and talented. Ironically, the quality of *Clayton Park* was an integral component in the bands early autumn decision to part ways after more than a decade of collaboration.

"We did what we wanted," said Plaskett, with McGettigan's nodding approval. "Nobody wanted to make the same kind of record. Everyone's kind of at a different point, both musically and in our lives. The momentum of Thrush Hermit that carried us through it all... well, we all started to question [it]."

Joel sips his espresso, pondering what's next. "We made a pretty



photo by Jon Elmer

Plaskett keeps his new project "close to the chest."