

ENTERTAINMENT

In pursuit of The Pursuit Of Happiness

by Fly on the Wall
Brunswickan Entertainment

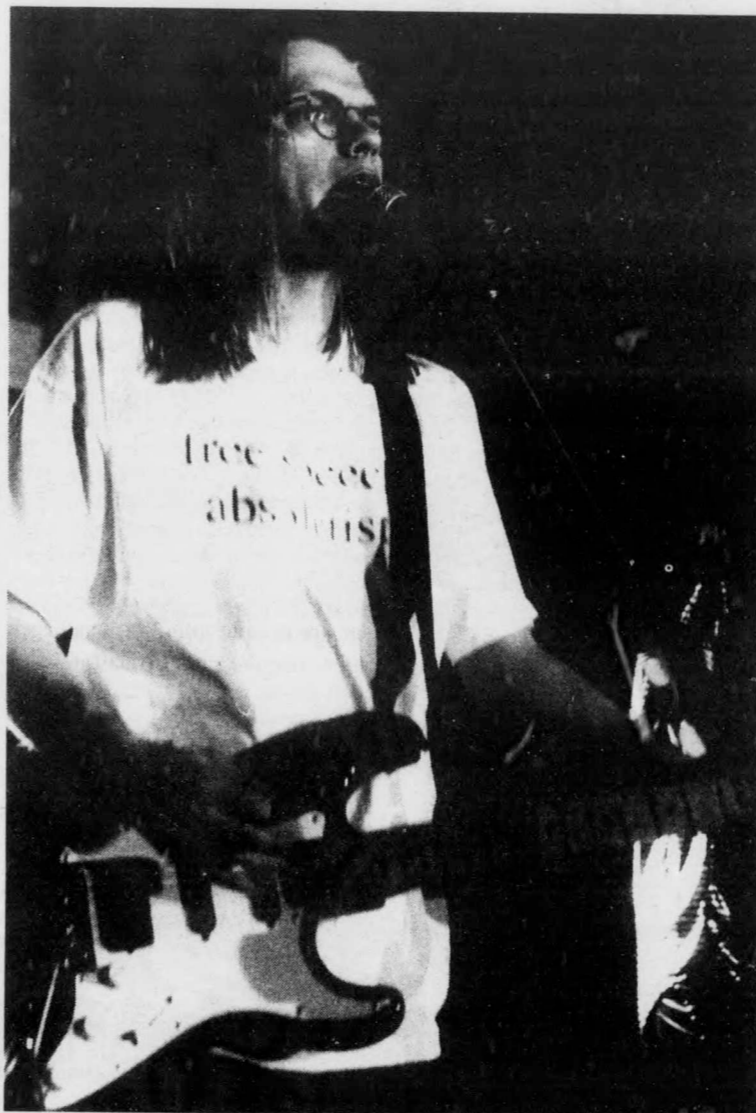
The Fly on the Wall takes in everything. It carefully observes every little detail and then types them into its fly-size keyboard. And good thing Fly on the Wall decided to buzz by The Dock last Friday evening. It caught an amazing show by The Pursuit of Happiness; but as always, the Fly recorded extra information and insight to share with its readers.

Well, it had been a while since The Pursuit of Happiness made an appearance in Fredericton. But lo and behold, Moe Berg still looked the same. Come to think of it, he's looked the same since 1986 when the band was first formed. Following the track order of their new album, *Where's The Bone*, TPOH ripped into 'Kalender' and then dove into 'Save the Whales.' Anyway, the Fly's attention drifted over to the very pretty visage of guitarist Kris Abbott. Her fiery red curls whipped wildly around her face as she expended all the energy she could on her portion of the small stage. Her hosiery was pretty cool too; floral patterns are making a comeback. At the same time, my multifaceted focus drifted over to Rachel Oldfield, the other angelic voice. I'm not quite sure what she was wearing, but it sure looked flammable.

Physical appearances and dress aside, TPOH were rocking as hard as their reputation indicated they rocked. But during the third song I noticed something very unsettling. One of those incredibly talented boys from *The Brunswickan's* photo department attempted to shoot photos of the band, as is the custom when musical troupes grace Fredericton with their presence. Anyway, the Fly deemed it rude for the photo guy to be physically steered away from the stage by a roadie, and then yelled at for merely doing his job. Resuming his stance after the roadie (who obviously wasn't pursuing happiness) finished his tirade, he was abruptly yanked from behind and pulled over to the side of the small platform again for using his camera flash. Meanwhile, Moe tugged off his old hockey sweater to reveal a 'free speech absolutist' statement plastered on his white T-shirt, then continued to tap material from the new CD (as is the custom, mind you), offering little banter for the crowd.

But hold on! The photographer was shoved again, this time by the guitar tech. Keep up the good work, guys! Gotta protect the band from fatal eye blinding camera flashes at all costs. Eventually, what posed for dancers eventually arose and wiggled and squiggled within the confines of The Dock's dance area. I felt bad for those paying patrons who couldn't see past the bouncing bodies. Fortunately, from my vantage point on the wall I can take in the entire show, not just the backs and behinds of some inebriated beer swillers.

Oh, the guitar tech was on the move



Against all odds, we get our Pursuit of Happiness photo.
Photo by Courageous Mark Bray

again, wielding an acoustic guitar for Moe. This could only mean that we were about to be subjected to 'Gretzky Rocks,' probably the greatest thing you can experience in under two minutes. Quick, catchy and over before you know it, Moe pledges allegiance to The Great One with the witty, whimsical lyrics that are Moe Berg (and The Pursuit of Happiness—it's not a one man show). TPOH's first big hit 'I'm An Adult Now' soon reared its head, but the long instrumental in the middle led to even more dancing. It was perhaps the largest moving audience at The Dock so far this year, but the dancing was reminiscent of a Charlie Brown Christmas special. I shudder at the memory (of the dancers, that is. I like Charlie Brown). 'I'm An Adult Now' briefly delved into 'Heterosexual Man' by the Odds for one mere line. Coming back to chorus and verse, the song sounded excellent in its longer form, making me long for longer TPOH songs (six of the 13 tunes on *Where's The Bone* weigh in at under three minutes).

Hey, Moe finally talked to the kids for longer than 30 seconds this time. Well, he stopped for a pudding break. And one lucky fan got to eat from the same Jello pudding container that Moe snacked on. Mmmmm, pudding. And tobacco. Music from 'Cigarette Dangles' filled the air, while Oldfield and bassist Brad Barker carried on this weird little flirtation thing throughout the remainder of the show. Curiouser and curiouser... But since I've mentioned the names of the entire group,

I should state that Brad Gilby is the drummer (percussionists are people, too).

TPOH left the stage for good at this point in the show. No, just kidding. They came back for an encore (Surprise! Why even bother leaving? They're obviously coming back). Upon their return the familiar theme from *Friends* escaped from Berg's guitar and he sang until the chorus before he realized how stupid he sounded. But, my gosh! Get the roadies! Someone—a girl—managed to jump the height of the stage to stand beside Moe. But wait a sec. No one was tackling her. I guess brief discharges of light are much more hazardous to the band than individuals storming the stage and coming into bodily contact with them. When will I figure these things out...

The two song encore quickly ended and the majority of the people exited the building, but Moe remained behind for the autograph session. All in all, The Pursuit of Happiness displayed great showmanship and great music and great ability to keep their balance (hey, it's a real asset). If TPOH return to Fredericton again (I'll go out on a limb and bet they will), I would strongly recommend you pay the cover charge to witness one of Canada's perennial bands. If not for the thrill of hearing amazing tunes made even better live, then just to get your lazy carcass off your couch. Just please, please, please don't dance if you can't. Remember, the Fly's eyes see all...

Here's Moe - where's Curly?

by Peter J. Cullen
Brunswickan Entertainment

Even as Moe Berg pulled out his chair to sit down, he was already shattering the rock star image: he was drinking wine, not beer; he had glasses, not contacts; he wore an old hockey sweater, not expensive tailor-made clothing. Whoever said that musicians should be loud, boisterous and colourful would shake their heads looking at the frontman for The Pursuit of Happiness. Nonchalant and relatively quiet, the long-haired beatnik dispels any preconceived notions of musicians equalling coolness.

Throughout the interview, Berg constantly provided short, terse answers to each question posed, refusing to spew the clichéd, meaningless tripe that lead singers are often wont to do. Although he stated that interviews and shows do not phase him in the least any more, he constantly rubbed his arms and turned his head from side to side as if the whole interview experience was just uncomfortable for him. But that could very well be the case.

Se Moe Berg is a geek; a self-confessed, always have - always will be, geek.

His continued presence in the music industry partially adds to that problem. "Well, one thing about being in a rock band is that it leaves you in a suspended state of adolescence. It's very spiritually and intellectually stunting so you kind of get to act like a kid all the time, which is probably not that good for ya," he laughed.

The fact that Berg remains totally at ease confessing his uncoolness exists in 'Save the Whales' and 'I Should Know' on TPOH's new album, *Where's The Bone*. In regard to his past, Berg explained that "Nothing's changed. I started out a geek and I still am one. We've tried very hard not to cultivate [the rock n' roll image]. One of the things that we're most proud of is the fact that we've never taken ourselves very seriously and we've been very self deprecating."

In fact, the fame and fortune aspects remain foreign to TPOH in general. "We've never tried to be rock stars and we've always tried to be very accessible, so I don't think very many people think of us as rock stars. I just don't think that's a perception that most people

have [of us]," Berg commented. The reason mainly lies in the mannerisms of the band: their dress is nothing extraordinary, the pink and blue pins restraining Berg's hair from flopping into his eyes while he plays are the essence of uncool, and the band approaches the entire extravaganza as a business, not a happy-go-lucky game. Fans are essential to a band's success, but Berg's life does not hinge on the various viewpoints possessed by the multitude of TPOH fans; in fact, it hardly seems like he cares at all. "I don't really know what people think about us; I never really pay attention," Berg admitted. "We see our fans at our shows and that's all the interaction I sort of get, so I don't know what people at large think about us."

But Berg attests that superstar status totally passes him by. "When I'm in Toronto or something, I'm just seen as, like, part of the furniture. No one even cares if I walk into a room; it's like, 'Who gives a shit, it's just Moe Berg.'" But does the casual demeanour people express towards the lead singer bother him? Not at all. "I'd much rather that [I'm ignored]," he said. "I'd hate to not be able to go places. That'd be a real drag."

For Berg, *Where's The Bone* is not just his fourth album, but the first that he indulges himself as a producer. Co-produced with Aubrey Winfield, Berg enjoys the artistic control and direction he possesses on the technical side. "I hope to do it from now on," he said. "The benefits are that you're in charge. I have a basic idea of how I want things to go and so I don't have to work with anybody else's conflicting opinion. I'm the ultimate arbiter of whatever goes on."

Berg's meal soon arrived and he trotted off to devour his dinner. Later that evening, The Pursuit of Happiness assembled on stage with Berg leading the way, resplendent in all his geekdom. But as if the crowd cared; the music alone spoke for itself as the masses thoroughly relished the sounds and lyrics conveyed by TPOH's number one nice guy. Berg just strapped on his guitar and put his lips to the mike and suddenly the crowd had a hero. He ripped through song after song, and then remained behind after the show to quip with the crowd and to sign autographs. If only every geek could be as cool as Moe Berg.

THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

