

So who the hell are The Pushkings?

One of the best things about the Halifax On Music festival (formally the much more jauntily-titled Halifax Pop Explosion...) is that it offers a platform for new bands to present their wares to a music hungry audience. This time round, we were treated to the international debut of The Pushkings, a four-piece band hailing from Massachusetts - they hadn't yet played outside the US, but considering the reaction they received in Nova Scotia, they will probably do it again.

Their initial release was a 7" single that sounded more than a little like their idols at that time, Pavement. They even got Pavement's head honcho Stephen Malkmus to write complementary sleeve notes for them. But then something happened - the line-up changed slightly to the current one of David on drums, Matt on bass and Finn and Carrick on guitar (with all of them, I believe, contributing vocals), and they started producing some wonderful pop music that didn't sound anything like Pavement.

They also jumped to a new record label - Sealed Fate Records, which is owned and run by Eric Masunaga from The Dambuilders. In fact, they are the only band on the label, so they benefit from Eric's production, experience and general loving care. After the show in Halifax, all four members of the band and myself huddled into their spanking new rental van to conduct what must be their first major Canadian interview - another *Brunswickian* exclusive!!!

The first thing that I heard by The Pushkings was the 7" that had all kinds of nice things said by Stephen from Pavement on the back of the sleeve. But now you seemed to have changed your sound quite a lot to just good old fashioned pop. What happened?

There was one 7" that intervened in between, but that first 7" was so long ago that maybe we just matured. We were a very young band then, and it was a form of adoration for Pavement - we always wondered if Stephen was making fun of us or not. But it is different, and we finally feel that we sound like we were aiming for.

So what are you aiming for now?

The top...top of the sound, top of the chart (laughter) - no, that's not true. We're aiming to write good songs, play quality shows and have a good time while we're doing it.

Most people know practically nothing about The Pushkings - give us the potted history of the band.

We've been together for about two years in this line-up, and we all met at school in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Back before this line-up, there was another bassist who we kicked out. When we were auditioning for a new bassist, there was one guy there and we were running through 'Queen Of Spain' from the first single, and Matt was in the hallway listening, so he came in and tried out. And then he eventually joined the band. But back then we sounded so much like Pavement...so let's talk about now.

So were you still doing the Pavement thing when Matt joined?

For a little while, but the first single was done before Matt joined. So basically, you can't blame Matt for it at all. We finally realised that it was cool to sing at the top of your lungs, to add both melody and harmony to the songs, to play well and to take some time to record the stuff. And now we have a new 45 coming out on Sealed Fate Records which is the label we are on now, and it sounds a lot like we do now - it isn't dated. Our previous releases sound like we used to, but we're striding past that. Now we really

do take the time to realize our potential, and we do everything we can to make it a flawless record, be it a 45 or a full-length. We're more mature...grown up - the album was going to be called The Pushkings - *Older*, but since George Michael got there first, we're going to call it *Puberty* instead.

When is the album coming out?

The CD is coming out in January, and the vinyl is coming out in November. But it's not some kind of Pearl Jam thing because vinyl is such a cool thing, it is out of necessity. We want to get promos out for the CD, so we're using vinyl for that. It'll be a little more rare, but basically the same album.

What about your new sound? Are you just doing a pure pop thing?

When you turn on the radio now, you hear shit. So, sooner or later, you end up listening to the oldies station, and it can feel that that is the only quality music out there - college radio is not what it claims to be. But the reason for our sound is not that we are nostalgists or obsessed with the past, it's just that quality songs were written then. People just took what was available to them then and put together quality songs and great records, and we eventually realised that's what should be done - take all of our potential and use it in the best possible way. That's what we're doing now. The sound may be different on the second album, but that's something that might just develop. We're trying to be what we've always dreamed a pop band can be.

With pop, every song has to be something that will stick in someone's mind.

Exactly, and every song has to present itself as a separate world mentally and sonically. That's our theory, and that's what we try to capture - thanks to Eric, we can do that. He is a total ace, and the best producer we could have. He seems to know everything we needed to make the record. He really does believe in us. We joke that the record could almost be a greatest hits album because every song is so strong.

Initially, you always had that Pavement comparison, but now who do you compare yourselves to?

We're not modelling ourselves after anybody now. We're basically taking everything we've ever loved individually and bringing that to every song. Other people have come to us with some viable comparisons that we don't disagree with, like Holiday. But that's not to say that we listen to those records and try to emulate them. Finn's mom keeps asking if we are part of something bigger because there are so many bands that are doing the poppy thing these days - we don't know, we'll see. But that's her theory. There seems to be more of that happening in Canada since people are more into pop than they are in places like Boston.

So do you find difference between places like Halifax and Boston?

Yeah, like after the show last night when Mark Robinson played. Usually in Boston, they kick you out before the band has even played the last note, switch on the lights and start sweeping up. But last night after the show, they put on 'Common People', everyone got on the dance floor and stayed there for two hours. It was awesome. This has been such a good experience.

How did you end up here for Halifax On Music?

We just got invited - it was partly because of Eric as The Dambuilders have played up here before. He also has a relationship with some bands up here - he spent some time recording with Superfriendz, and we played with them once in



Matt from The Pushkings strikes a pose at Halifax On Music

Boston. But we should apologise to them because we didn't really put together a good bill that night - the headliners were awful, but at least there were two good bands.

And what does the future hold for The Pushkings?

We see interviews all the time where bands say that the next album will sound like this, and then we'll sound like that, and we really just don't know. All we can say is that we've put together a record that we're really proud of. The music is almost less of the plan than our careers - we'd love to be able to pay some rent from our music, but if we can't then that's fine too. It would be so nice to be able to record in straight stints and then go on tour - we haven't done that much yet. Right now we are still pretty wide-

eyed about what is happening to us, and what we can do, and we'd like to maintain some of that - we still feel lucky, and we love what we're doing. Hopefully when the album comes out, we'll turn a few heads.

Selected Discography

Well, not much at all really. There is a 7" on Sealed Fate Records, and an album to come soon too (but it isn't called *Puberty*...)



It's getting late, and we had this little space left to fill. So I decided to use a hedgehog just like in the good old days when I was in charge. Sigh.