

Entertainment

R&B fuels Lincolns

by Randal Smathers

When the opportunity came through to cover the Silver Bullet Blues Fest at the Mayfield Inn last weekend, I jumped at the chance. Canada's three premier blues-R&B acts sharing the same stage with one of Edmonton's own? Specifically the Downchild Blues Band, the Lincolns, Powder Blues, and Rusty Reed and the Southside Shuffle. Too good to be true, surely!

Prakash John, **The Lincoln**, consented to an interview. He is the leader, manager, and bass player of the group.

The considerable experience of John and his band has been well covered. Suffice to say this is a veteran group of musicians. There has been one change to the lineup recently. Michael Dunston has been added as lead singer, replacing Steven Ambrose.

"As a singer, Michael Dunston has

He also maintains that he does not give false expectations of the band when it is not at its peak.

"I don't try to hype the band. This is the strongest group I've had yet, so I'm happy to promote the band on this visit to Edmonton. If you were to check our bookings, we give our fans more for their money than any rock band," he said.

The Lincolns' devotion to their music is matched by their fans' support of the band. John acknowledged this by saying, "The band doesn't receive appreciative response due to records. You can't say that about most pop groups. They only tour when a record is a hit. People notice the dishonesty in that, they can sense when it's not a real band. The Lincolns have a character of their own outside of records."

John also pointed out that the band plays

It makes up for all the abuse we suffer at the hands of record executives and radio stations.

received rave reviews from music critics. Much of that may be from sheer relief that the band has a truly R&B singer, and also somebody who, while wildly professional, is not a clown," said John. He added that Ambrose was "not capable of discretion," and that you "can't sing 'When a Man Loves a Woman' tongue in cheek more than about once a year" without getting "insulting to rhythm and blues fans."

He also added that Dunston gives the music "an R&B soulful edge. His vocals, in fact, compete with the high level of musicianship on stage."

"On the professional level, our biggest criticism was that the singer was no match for the band," he said of Ambrose. "Despite that, I stuck by him for six years. He worked hard in the band and certainly had a unique personality."

"On the personal level, Steve chose to become a Scientologist. I have no objection to anyone maintaining personal beliefs, but when you start to sell dianetics books at my gigs, you come to grief with me. It is an insult to our fans. It gives a distorted view of what the band members stand for. Personally, as a Christian, I found it distasteful and intolerable. I found out much to my horror. I didn't catch on for the longest time," said John. He also said that when asked to change his approach, Ambrose chose instead to leave the band and move to the west coast "to be closer to his religion."

There is also a part-time band member. Earl Seymour plays sax for both the Lincolns and the Arrows. Both bands were in town this week, so Seymour actually was scheduled to play two gigs in succession in the same night. The Arrows were playing at the U of A, something Prakash John would like to do. He contacted the university booking service a couple of years ago and was "laughed at," according to John. "It was insulting," he said.

When asked why he thought there is a lack of interest on campus, he replied, "One reason is the agents who control gigs... especially The Agency out of Toronto."

"I don't use agents and I'm the only band among my peers who books successfully coast to coast," he said, adding that perhaps agencies fear competition. Paying agents, he said "just gets the band in debt and everything still gets screwed up. I may as well get the job done right myself."

John obviously feels slighted by the Canadian music establishment. He said, "While R&B in Canada is now, especially on radio stations, all the rage, we've been playing (this style) for seven years. We're the only R&B band in Canada that brings R&B coast to coast. While others may win Junos, we are the most respected."

a different set every night, and even the songs are not done the same way each time. "Otherwise why pay to see what you can hear on your record player?" he said. "I love this music. I choose this music. We play what I feel like, when I feel like it. I call for the songs I want when I feel like hearing them."

John said the hardcore fan support is important to the band's success. "People don't just disappear. Many groups lose their following when their hit is not remembered. That keeps me secure, and that's what keeps many rock stars terribly insecure," he said, adding, "I'm not putting down that style of music, it was good to me."

The Lincolns' Canadian identity is "most important" to John, who said the group is a "Canadian R&B product. We have kept Canadian, we play here. I maintain that belief that Canadian R&B is as valid as American R&B. We, in Canada, don't have to listen to U.S. records." John also feels that if the band were from the States or England, they "would have been signed long ago."

As to the band's future direction, John says, "I don't see the Lincolns as purely an R&B band. I see the band using its R&B roots and its musicianship to develop into a band like Level 42 or Huey Lewis and the News, two bands who have pasts steeped in both R&B and club performances."

"I have given the Canadian record industry musical geniuses all the chances to sign a band like the Lincolns and no longer feel like being stymied for some record executive's lack of imagination," said John. He also said he would probably tour the States "in the new year, now that I feel the band is finally mature enough to be presented to a U.S. audience."

The Lincolns do almost exclusively covers of R&B tunes from the sixties and seventies, and John obviously receives a lot of heat for this. He responded before a question was even asked.

"Dennis Keltie, our keyboard player, is not only the greatest Hammond organ specialist in Canada, but is a very good pop writer who till recently ran a band called the Extras. Earl Seymour of the pop band the Arrows is a constant member of the Lincolns. We have never done strict reproductions of R&B classics," said John. "Our arrangements are contemporary and original and that's certainly a major criteria in having hit tunes on the air. Let's not forget the large majority of hits on the air today have very strong R&B grooves lifted from classic performances of the sixties and seventies."

He went on to say, "When people ask why we don't write any original stuff, what



Patrick Harbron

Illustration by Dean Motter

are they hearing? As far as the Lincolns being a copy band, let's remember that 'Harlem Shuffle' by the Rolling Stones is one of the oldest R&B tunes, done by Bob and Earl. 'Under the Boardwalk' has been done twice recently by American artists. Rickie Lee Jones and Mellancamp, what's his name. Copy songs are done every month, every week, and climb the charts every day." He said, as well, that most of the old British Invasion bands did copies of American R&B and country songs, naming the Beatles, Animals, and Stones among others.

For the fan, John feels "the wealth of R&B music that could inspire and educate is immense. It's staggering. There are two anthology volumes, one by Motown and one by Atlantic that are a must for anybody... musicians can learn volumes from

and fans may retain permanent goosebumps."

In case you feel by now that John is bragging, his respect for the originals is returned. He cites meeting his "R&B heroes" as his "greatest privilege" while he was a member of the Funkadelics.

Two of those heroes, Ruffin and Kendrick, did a show with the Lincolns last year in Ottawa. "They had a 15 piece band, the whole thing. After they did their sound check, they were being served dinner right by the side of the stage while we were doing our sound check. After we finished our first song, David Ruffin got up, followed by the entire band, and gave us a standing ovation. That was a big thrill for me. That's respect. It makes up for all the abuse we suffer at the hands of record executives and radio stations."

Costello comes through

Blood and Chocolate
Elvis Costello and the Attractions

review by Marc Simao

Besides the fact that the title makes my girlfriend nauseous, this is one great album. Elvis follows up a masterpiece, *King of America*, with an album that is not as good but does not disappoint in any way.

Most of the songs deal with the classic Costello theme of rejected love. He gets deeply personal on the sparse, acoustic tortured love of "I Want You", while "I Hope You're Happy Now" shows a pissed-off Elvis stating to his ex-lover, 'you make him sound like frozen food/his love will last forever.' There is also the lighthearted side demonstrated by the lyrics of "Next Time 'Round", in which Elvis tells his reincarnation believing girl that, 'You'll be someone else's baby/but I'll be underground.'

"Home Is Anywhere You Hang Your Head" explores the classic loser in love, Mr. Misery, who is *Contemplating murder again/he must be in love.* "Crimes of Paris" is a great song, in which Elvis takes aside a friend to explain that her new love is not what it seems. "Blue Chair" deals with a girl everyone desires, but who also screws

everyone up.

This album evokes sentiments of early Costello as well as carrying on the personal manner of last spring's *King of America*. "Uncomplicated" would fit right in on Elvis' 1978 classic *This Year's Model*, whereas "I Want You" and "Battered Old Bird" could have easily been *King of America* tracks.

Costello's wit and sarcasm are very apparent on many of these songs, most notably on the wordy, social commenting "Tokyo Storm Warning". He sings about *The K.K.K. convention are all stranded in the bar/they wear hoods and carry shotguns in the mainstreets of Montgomery/but they're helpless as babies 'cause they're only here on holiday.*

"Battered Old Bird" deals with the characters in an asylum and no matter how often you listen to it, you'll be shocked by *Next door to them is a man so mild/till he chopped off the head of a visitor's child.*

The best song on this album and one of Elvis' finest ever is *Poor Napoleon*. With an incredible bass line and superb percussion, the song seems majestic in a sense. It deals with a mistress of Napoleon's who is a real tease. This is a song which would stand out on anyone's album, and this is an album which would stand out in anyone's collection.