

# Freedom's Frenzy A Tough Sell

by Gene Kosowan  
Photos by Linda Tenant



To put it mildly, **The Sons of Freedom** are about as intense as a band can get. Their mind-numbing frenetic approach, spiked with their provocative social commentary is much akin to a sonic viper imbedding its fangs into your eardrum, and refusing to let go no matter how hard you kick and scream.

Be that as it may, it was their US label, Slash (the band's debut record from last year was released domestically on WEA) that turned a deaf ear to the Vancouver-based quartet and dropped them from the roster. Although lead vocalist **Jim Newton** is confident that another record company will snap them up, the Sons now face the dilemma of relying on the road as their only bread and butter.

"If we do any more touring, it's just going to make the whole image of the band and its basic purpose completely redundant," says Newton. "We'll get a rap for just being a touring club band like **Ska-Boom** and **Doug and the Slugs**. We're not like that. We're a recording band."

Lacking that opportunity for now, Newton is still grateful for the experience. The self-titled endeavour chalked up 10,000 copies in sales in Canada, bolstered by a number of dates in the country and one American West Coast venture. The release also received considerable attention in England, where it is currently being handled by London Records. Despite the bitterness surrounding their lack of an outlet, the British native is still optimistic.

"A label really has to push a band. We got a distribution deal in Europe, but no one would cough up the bucks to get us over there. We don't get tour support, so every time we lose money on the road, we have to make up for it somehow. It doesn't really make you feel that it's worthwhile. We can just about break even in Canada now. It's worth doing because the demand's out there."

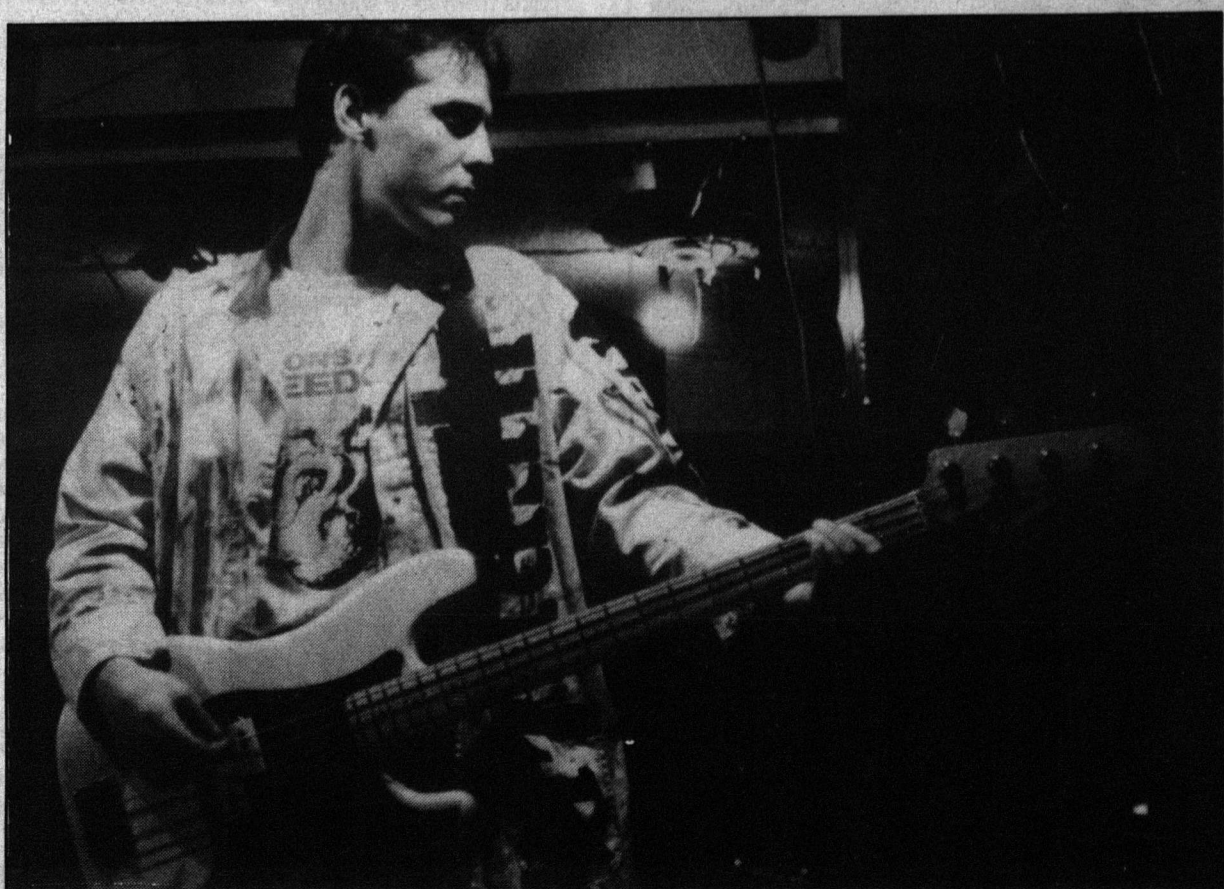
Their current situation is a far cry from their auspicious beginnings in Lotusland. Formed in 1986 when Newton and casual music partner-guitarist **Don Harrison** hooked up with bassist **Don Binns** and drummer **Don Short**, Sons of Freedom, inadvertently named after an extremist faction of the Doukhobor sect, assaulted the Pacific masses with their muscular wall of sound after their first gig with **Bamff** and scoring second at **Shindig**, CITR's battle of the bands competi-

tion. Studio engineer **David Ogilvie** (54-40, **Skinny Puppy**), upon hearing the band, passed the buzz word along to Capitol Records before the outfit was eventually signed to Slash. It's been mayhem ever since.

Using the trial-by-terror approach to writing and performing, Sons of Freedom have never been a band to jump into anything feet first.

"Even now we never really think specifically about what we are or what we're doing; we just kind of do it."

The attitude even extends to songwriting. Says Newton, "The whole creative process is a very messy one. Most of the songs come out of jams and somehow we have to go through and edit it all and get it back down into some kind of shape. It's not really efficient, but it does seem to work. We throw out a hell of a lot."



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published by  
FM88-CJSR

They also put out accordingly. Tunes like "Super Cool Wagon," "The Criminal," and "Mona Lisa" don't pull any punches. Newton's semi-tonal delivery complements the Sons' manic barrage suitably, and evoke the listener to crawl out of a cold sweat. Despite the socially reactionary combination, the singer denies their music has any political significance.

"It's really important to communicate," he says. "There's nothing worse that a performer singing songs and people only pick up on superficial things. I'm starting to realize more and more that rock music is not much more than an aural backdrop to a fashion accessory. But at the same time, I also have a conscience. I try to incorporate ideas that I think are important, but I don't think we're a political band per se."

"I was brought up in England and the politics in England are very similar to the politics in BC. You have a right wing government which is dealing with a large amount of people who are working class and obviously left wing. I hate Thatcher, but I hate Vander Zalm, too."

Pigeonholing is another stigma the band has avoided, but it has undoubtedly hurt them, not only at the record counter, but at the radio stations and venue gates as well. College airplay has been their sole trump card for exposure, and as for gigging options...

"We can't really go on a stadium tour and try to open for **Metallica** or **Scorpions**, because we're not a metal band, and it's tricky for us to even think about getting on a bill with **REM**. When we first pulled into towns, the only people we'd get coming to gigs would be kind of your old druggie punk types, purple hair; your alternative scene type of dudes. But in Vancouver, where we're a bit bigger than in any other town in Canada, we're getting a lot more straighter people coming to gigs. But it's still not the much more conservative types that one can get at 54-40 and **Pursuit of Happiness**."

If the luck of the Sons does turn, Newton would like to pass on the same message that inspirations like **Television**, **Sonic Youth**, and **Gang of Four** provided him with.

"The last thing that anyone wants to do is tell people how to run their lives. Mostly what I do is try and get people to ask questions about themselves. Challenge themselves and see if they can open up to different ideas. Because you have to keep yourself open; otherwise you won't learn anything."