

## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# HALIFAX ON MUSIC

## Julie Doiron and the Wooden Stars Unlikely companions

BY JON ELMER

Julie Doiron and the Wooden Stars are an odd couple. Kicking off this year's *Halifax On Music* festival on Friday night, the duo proved that odd rocks.

First performing in their regular roles, the Wooden Stars left an ever-growing crowd stunned with an intense whirl of experimental rock before being joined on-stage by Doiron.

Hailing from Ottawa, the Wooden Stars spent an hour diving in and out of tangents that manifested as dangerously talented jam sessions. Culling largely from *The Moon*, their latest release, the Stars referred to the studio version for only a framework, expanding the songs into epic journeys of jarring crescendos that continued well

beyond the breaking point. After a ten-minute finale that shook the foundation of the Marquee, I was curious just how the Wooden Stars were to fit in with Julie Doiron.

The curiosity and anticipation was heightened when Julie arrived on stage and began into an acoustic number, barely audible, whispering over her quietly strumming guitar. It seemed to me that something would have to give, if these polar opposites of the rock-game were going to mesh. When the Wooden Stars reappeared to join Julie, it quickly began to all make sense.

Presenting tracks from their Sappy Records collaboration, *Julie Doiron and the Wooden Stars*, the duo seemed to meet half way, in a sweet display of energy and emotion. With a band, Julie's vocals take on a melodious strength. They grab ahold of you

and never relent, in an aspect that has been missing since her days playing bass in Eric's Trip.

So how did the collaboration work out? Imagine Julie Doiron holding a massive jar, with holes punched in it (like those bug-catchers of yester-year) and inside the jar are the Wooden Stars — the bugs. Now, every so often, Julie opens the lid, freeing the frighteningly talented sounds that would be impossible to keep under wraps. But let me be clear, during their time in Julie's bottle, the Wooden Stars are still rocking out, and we can definitely still hear them — they're just more structured.

The songs are all written by Julie, but the Stars have dabbled their fingers into the reworking process. The result is an unbelievable synthesis of talent, and one great show.

## Halifax on Music finale concert has it all

Lubricant, duct tape and a trophy to boot

BY NICOLE VILLENEUVE AND JILL DAVIS

As per every year, this year's *Halifax On Music* festival came to a close with an all-ages finale show Sunday afternoon at The Pavilion. Playing the show were Cloud Car, Blurtonia, and a triple-headlining threat of Thrush Hermit, The Smugglers and Pansy Division.

After having the stage and mic's warmed up by Cloud Car and Blurtonia, Halifax music staple Thrush Hermit decided the time had come to take the game to a new level. With a favourable crowd packed living-room-esquely into the Pavilion, the boys simply rocked us all straight up. With emotions running high after word of the impending break-up, Thrush Hermit held nothing back (as usual), ripping off tunes representing each of their releases, in one of those shows that make you look to the person beside you and just shake your head. With stage presence that's second to none, Joel Plaskett left the

building halfway through "The Day We Hit The Coast" to retrieve the bands latest prop — a hand held bank of flood lights. With blinding lights focused on him, Joel duct taped his mouth shut and swung from the rafters — all in the name of rock'n roll.

Continuing the with the most rump-shaking action of the day was none other than Vancouver's The Smugglers. The punks-in-suits hit the stage roaring, with no shortage of voltage for the rest of the set and their feet in the air more than on the stage.

At one point they even called "hometown heroes" Plumtree, who happened to be in attendance, on stage to be the judges for the dance contest. Yes, a dance contest. The lucky audience member to shake his/her booty to the best of the girls' likings was to take home a trophy brought specially from BC by the boys!

The set list was a compilation of tracks from all of their releases, and even one from their yet-to-be-released album, *Rosie*. Those punks know how to rock,

and to quote Joel Plaskett of Thrush Hermit from earlier in the day, "they can Smuggle me anytime!"

And of course, the ones to thank for even having a festival this year, the one and only Pansy Division. Not aware that there had not been plans to hold the festival, it was their call of interest in playing the show that prompted the organizers to go with it.

Staying true to their shtick, Pansy Division kept the crowd on their toes with their gay anecdotes, handing out tubes of lubricant to the amused spectators.

Appearing at the festival three years ago, the band hasn't changed at all, save for some new songs. Taking breaks from stage to change into lovely dresses, singing songs of homage to the beautiful men of Canada and lighting the cymbals on fire, they don't even try to hide the fact that they're all about gimmick. Definitely in their prime on stage, in the lights, flirting with the cute boys in front.

With files from Jon Elmer



photos by Jon Elmer