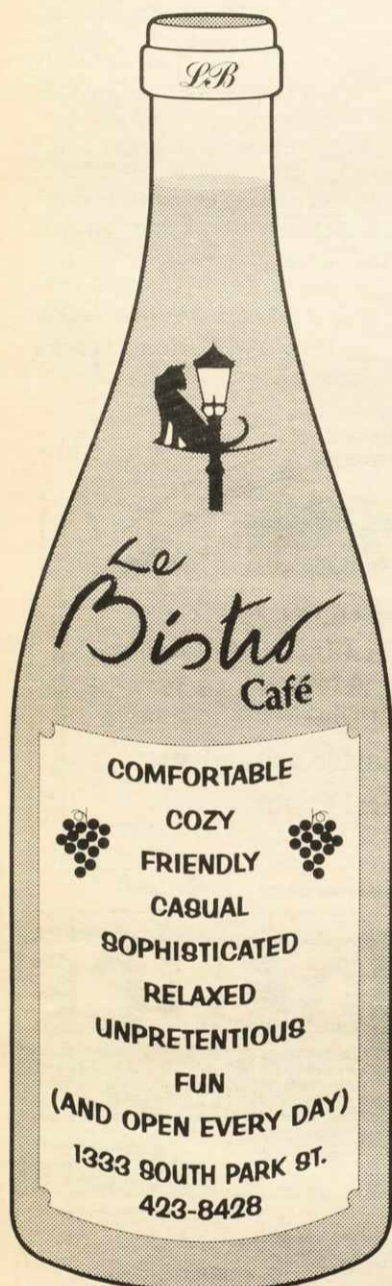


Three musicians make themselves Scarce

by James Covey

Chick, Joyce, and Jud from Providence, Rhode Island, have been together as Scarce for less than a year, but in that time they have impressed a lot of people, including several prominent record labels. Their "Scorpion Tray" single is out on Delmore Records, and they will soon release "Hope" on All The Money Records. Halifax audiences remember them fondly as the surprise hit of last September's Halifax Pop Explosion, and recently they returned for a two-night headlining stand at the Double Deuce. I talked on the phone with lead singer/guitarist Chick Graning from his home in Providence, a couple of days before those shows.



JC: You guys came up and played the Pop Explosion last September. Now was that your first time up here, and did you enjoy it?

CG: Yes and yes.

JC: Who did you meet when you were up here who was interesting?

CG: The Bubaiskull guys were funny. Laughed myself to tears with them in New York, at Puffy's. While we were up there (in Halifax), oh, god, I don't know. I was pretty lit most of the time.

JC: Actually, I'll tell you one thing I liked about the Pop Explosion appearances, was, you guys played the afternoon, and then again in the evening, and it seemed like you put a lot of energy into the afternoon show, even though there wasn't a lot of people there or whatever, and then you came out and did it all over again in the evening, which I thought was amazing.

CG: Yeah, well, it's fun to do, you know.

JC: You guys put that level of energy into every show?

CG: We try.

JC: I can believe it after seeing you do it twice in one day. Whom are you guys listening to lately, and what's influencing you?

CG: Let's see, let me go over here to my old CD player... Let's see, the new Afghan Whigs, Gentlemen. It's a good one, the whole thing. The History of Richard Thompson, *Watching the Dark*, that's a three-CD set. Really great. This new Swervedriver is good. I'm listening to an SVT tape — I think it was Jack Bruce's band. Early eighties punk rock band from San Francisco. They didn't go anywhere, but they were great. This new Mazzy Star, Bob Dylan *Good As I Been To You*, Tacklebox *Grand Hotel*, and an awful lot of Tom Waits. Oh yeah, and Captain Beefheart and John Lennon.

JC: You know, it's funny, that all makes sense — having heard you guys play, I can sort of see why you'd be listening to a lot of those groups. But it seems like when people are describing you, they don't know who to compare you to.

CG: That's good.

JC: That's what I think too, actually. I think that when they don't know what the heck they're seeing, that means they're seeing something original, right?

CG: Yes, it does.

JC: I was going through some of this press stuff on you guys, and there were

some pretty bizarre comparisons. Like, *Soul Asylum*?

CG: Like people are kind of grasping for straws. I really like that. It's just a rock and roll band, basically. But, what with all this alternative crap going on, you've gotta have some sort of label, and...

JC: Actually, I think the best "grasping" one that I saw was "Pixies influenced by Elvis Costello."

CG: I liked that one...

JC: That one was pretty close, I thought, but the "Tom Petty and the Byrds", that didn't quite work for me...

CG: I didn't know about that one either.

JC: Kinda strange.

CG: It's like, "What were you listening to?" (laughs)

JC: People keep remarking about Joyce's bass style...

CG: She blew up her amp last night, or she would be here, she's off fixing it right now.

JC: (laughs) You know, it's a shame, I'm not surprised.

CG: Yeah, I wasn't either.

JC: (laughs) When you were learning to play guitar, who was influencing you?

CG: My teachers, a lot of local people too. It wasn't so much other guitar players I could listen to and freak out about, it was just local people doing it right in front of me, you know? People you really definitely wouldn't have heard of. Those were really my influences.

JC: Have you guys been talking to any labels?

CG: Oh yeah, talking to labels of all descriptions. You know, taking our time about it. It's not something you really want to rush into.

JC: Yeah, well, it seems to be the way to go these days, is to establish an indie reputation first, spend some time doing that.

CG: Well, I did that for six years.

JC: OK, but maybe as a band.

CG: I don't know about that. You see, I kinda have a beef with that.

JC: Oh really? Tell me about that.

CG: It seems to me, a lot of indie labels, not all of 'em, definitely not all of them, but a lot of them are signing young inexperienced bands to contracts that they don't have the savvy to thoroughly peruse, or the money to afford a lawyer who can do it or will do it, to the degree that it needs to be done, and then these labels wait for the bands to get a little more valuable, and then they sell 'em like beef to a major label.

JC: Right, kind of a "band broker" thing.

CG: Yeah, basically, it's kinda gross, and I think the media hype about having to be on an indie label before you can do anything else or have any credibility as a musician, writer, or performer, you know, it's — crap! It's what you're doing in your room, the songs that you're writing, and the practice space that matter. You know, who cares what label you're on, really. And on an indie label, you're gonna go on tour, and might not get any tour support, come back home after two months, you'll be behind two or three months in rent, and among other things, you've got your day job, which you're not getting anymore, so you gotta get another one, you know. I've seen a lot of people in those situations, and it does seem to be the way to go, and that's to the advantage of the pocket books of a lot of indie label people, and I've seen that. So that's my opinion there.



Chick "Blinking is for Wussies" Graning onstage at the Double Deuce.

PHOTO: MIKE GRAHAM

I mean, it's good to play around for a while, and get your stuff together.

JC: Well, I'm almost surprised to hear you say that, not that I don't agree with you to some extent, but I think I read somewhere that you guys were interested in Sub Pop, and I mean Sub Pop constantly...

CG: They are one exception... that label's a good label. Smart people there, and stuff. You know, we were talking to them, and it didn't work out to the end...there are exceptions, but I'm speaking in general. And Sub Pop are an exception — they're a good label.

JC: So, obviously, you guys haven't thought too hard about putting together an album or anything like that yet, or have you?

"It's like watching television or being on it"

CG: Oh yeah! We're thinking about it right now. We're thinking about two or three albums right now, you know, trying to get the stuff together. We're starting to get into a situation where we're, you know, behind. We're just working creatively, that's kind of the point of the whole thing. JC: So, I always wonder, does that change how you think about writing songs? When you go from thinking about putting out your next single to planning, say, ten songs or something. CG: Well, you see, the thing is, most people do plan ten songs, and then they stop after ten or twelve or something, and wait until the next record to get together and write new songs or whatever. We just like to keep writing. One of us, two of us, or three

of us together. You know, all sorts forms, and we just keep moving that way.

JC: So people sometimes bring songs to the band, as individuals, that they've come up with?

CG: Yeah, that's how it starts, usually. Mostly, I've brought the songs in this last year, but Jud just got a guitar — his dad gave it to him, old '34 Gibson. Joyce has been writing, and we've been writing some together, just however it works best for any particular song. If I bring something in, and they change it, then they have then written part of that song, and I don't mind it being changed if it's for the better. We work pretty well together that way. There's no real set formula of writers, or a writer.

JC: So just whatever works at a given moment.

CG: Yeah. I've been writing longer, so I tend to come in with more. Which means I throw away more too, you know. It pretty much evens out.

JC: Do you like playing live better than recording, or have you done enough recording to think about that?

CG: Yeah, I have. They're different processes. It's an entirely different thing. You can't really compare it. It's like watching television or being on it.

JC: OK, but do you think you're a band that wants to tour constantly, be one of these total tour ethic kind of bands, or...

CG: Ooh, don't know yet. I'd like some road time, yeah, more than we've had. Wouldn't hurt at all. It might be a safe bet to say that we probably will be road dogs for a while. I would think so, yeah.

JC: Chance to destroy a few more amps.

CG: Yeah, definitely. And anything else up there.

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