



# Dan Hill

## and his band

Well I could remain totally calm throughout this review and pretend it was just another concert, but to me it wasn't! I'd be lying if I said I was anything but a big, big fan of Dan Hill.

It was Hill's first concert in over 18 months, a period he spent writing songs, running six miles a day and sitting by the lake in his native Toronto.

The year and a half break seemed to do him good and he was full of surprises. First of all he wore shoes for the first time in a live performance, an act which brought him discomfort he told me after, secondly he didn't have his customary white rug on stage. It was what he did have on stage, however, that was the biggest change—four new band members.

As I said to him, I was afraid he was going to lose his intimacy with the audience and he too was a little concerned about his "one to one" effect. All this worry was for naught. The band played tightly and beautifully and rather than jazzing up his old favourites the band merely filled in the background. There were no unnecessary lead break or drum solos, just good, simple music.

The audience appreciation was remarkable, and backstage that was what all the talk was about—how well Halifax received him. The audience was, naturally, sold out, and was well stocked with females, much to the delight of this reporter, and a surprisingly large number of patrons over 30.

Randy Dewell of CJCH began the night (it was good to see him in person because they all use the same voice on the air), and then Hill began the night with "The Seed of Music." He was obviously a

little nervous as he jumbled the words at one point, but it was smooth sailing from there on.

He sang all the regulars, "Dark Side of Atlanta", "Let the Song Last Forever", "You Make Me Want To Be", as well as a selection of new material from his new album which he hopes will be out in a couple of months. Some of these were "You Get a Little Harder", "Island" and his final song of the night "If Dreams Had Wings", the title cut of his upcoming L.P.

The songs I was especially glad to hear were the ones made possible by the extra acoustic guitar of David Wifler. Songs such as "Friends" and "Fountain", two beautiful numbers that Hill alone could not do justice to as compared to their recordings.

After "Sometimes When We Touch" was performed I headed backstage while Hill finished off the night. My interview had been pre-arranged, but I was told that I could join the forty or so press people when they came. Not being totally satisfied, I went over their heads and when Dan Hill came backstage I approached him. We shot the breeze for a couple of minutes and then he suggested we go to his dressing room and he'd give me a personal interview. It was nice to see that in person he was the same as he projects from stage, honest, friendly and almost humble. (May I also note, it was a pleasure to see that he was totally straight, something that a patron who has forked over up to \$8.50 should appreciate.)

The following is what Dan Hill and I discussed . . .

**P.T.** I want to speak to you first about your writing. Your songs are so successful, I

# Halifax studio to send film to Cannes

by Larry Brown

Hollywood in Halifax: Two Alumni Make Film by Larry Brown.

Two Dal graduates have set up a film studio and recently finished filming a 35 mm motion picture entitled South Pacific 1942 right here in Halifax. The studio, calling itself Surfacing Film Productions, will tentatively release the film in June, after it has premiered in the internationally renowned Cannes film exhibit. Distribution plans have not as yet been finalized.

Surfacing Film Productions is run by Paul and Michael Donovan; both are Dal Alumni. Paul graduated with a degree in physics before he decided to go on to filmmaking, and Michael received a B.A. in Political Science and also his law degree from Dalhousie. Paul went on and attended the London International Film School, and worked in the English film industry. Presently Paul takes care of the creative half of Surfacing Film Productions, and Michael looks after the business end of things.

Both brothers are native Haligonians, and when they initiated their company they saw no reason for this to change.

"Films don't have to be made in Hollywood or Toronto," Michael told the *Gazette*, and he sees no reason why Halifax can't be the base for a film center. Donovan cited the benefits of Halifax, noting its variety of terrain and access to the sea.

As far as Donovan knows, however, Surfacing Film is the only company of its kind around the Maritimes.

The film that was shot is presently in production stages; it is being spliced together by Paul in Toronto, where the facilities exist that are necessary.

believe, because they're so personal that many people can identify with them, as if they've been through the same experience themselves. They sound as if they've been written because you have something to say, something from inside you, and not because you need ten or twelve songs for your next album. Is that more or less true?

**D.H.** Yeah, that's true. I basically find that, I feel that I basically write songs as an outgrowth of what's happening around me. You know, I write them as I see them happening to other people, so they're really pretty well real life chronicles.

**P.T.** So you feel you've succeeded in not letting the world make a juke box out of you?

**D.H.** Yeah, I feel I have. I mean you always have to be careful. You know because when you travel too much and when you perform too much or record too much on a

Besides the need to go to Toronto for the editing phases, the camera equipment had to be rented from Montreal. But Michael said with today's high technology in transportation, the distances did not really cause problems.

Approximately half of the crew and actors were from Halifax, and the rest from a host of other places. The film provided employment for forty people over a six week stretch. One of the people employed was King's student Janet McMillan.

The film itself was written by Paul Donovan, and it is his first feature. Its title—South Pacific 1942—may be a misnomer, for the movie has nothing to do with the original South Pacific. It, unlike the original South Pacific, is a comedy; it concerns the fate of a Canadian submarine during WWII, which were non-existent in actual history.

The conflict in the film arises between the captain of the ship and the crew. The captain is hungry for military recognition, and he would like to destroy a Japanese aircraft carrier. The crew, however, have no aspirations for glory; they just want to stay alive. This provides the core of the story, which Michael seemed very enthused about, praising it for originality and wittiness.

Even though this was Surfacing Film Production's first film, it wasn't cheap; it cost around \$500,000. This figure, according to industry standards, is relatively low for a feature film. Yet it still is a substantial sum for a small company; Michael said the money was raised after arduous effort. The financial backing comes from investors who receive residuals; if the movie is successful, substantial sums can be gained, if the movie fails, the investment can be written off under tax losses. This write-off system

was an aid in financing Surfacing Film Production.

The Canadian tax concessions have also been good for the whole film industry. Donovan stated that the 1979 investment in Canadian movies was \$150 million, compared to only about \$12 million a year before the tax credits were established in 1977. There have been between 35-43 films made in Canada this year, which is quite a number considering that there are only about 250 films made in the entire English speaking world.

Of this number, only South Pacific 1942 was made in Halifax, although another film took advantage of Halifax's fine port and did shoot one week here in Halifax. It was entitled Virus, a film with Chuck Connors, which was backed by \$18 million of Japanese capital, and was also a story about a submarine. In fact, the company making that movie even bought the submarine set from Surfacing Film, which had been planning to sell it for scrap.

In selling its set to Virus, Surfacing Film was able to economize the cost of the movie. Another factor that kept costs low was that the movie was filmed indoors, inside the old Keith's brewery. This prudent management of finances assured the low cost of the film. At the price it cost to make, Michael is confident the film can make money.

In fact, they're not even waiting to see how South Pacific 1942 performs; another movie is going to be filmed this summer. Paul takes charge of the creative end, and Michael directs the commercial aspects; so it gives them two separate areas, each able to work efficiently. With this control, many future films are already being planned by Halifax's own studio.

It might not be Hollywood, but one studio is a beginning!

schedule you can become a commodity very fast, so you have to be careful.

**P.T.** When you write a song, I would guess after hearing them you would write the words first. Do you write the words first and then sit down with a complete lyric and put music to it or do you find they flow together?

**D.H.** It really varies from song to song. You know, with some songs, the lyrics come first, some songs the melody comes first. Very often I get an idea melodically chording wise and an idea lyrically and the two sort of propel each other through the course of the song.

**P.T.** Because your songs do seem so personal, when it was first suggested to you that you give some of your lyrics to Barry Mann, did that offend you at first that someone thought somebody else should write music for you?

**D.H.** Well, it seemed sort of, yes, I didn't like it too much. Only because I felt pretty

good as a total songwriter. You know, but I was so impressed with Barry Mann as a songwriter himself that I was willing to take a shot at it, because I really admired his work and I thought that the creative experience would justify that kind of experiment, and it seems to have paid off.

**P.T.** I believe "Sometimes When We Touch" was the first song you wrote with Mann and it really brought you to international attention and it has been your most successful single. Of all the songs you've ever written, which is your personal favourite?

**D.H.** Well, you know, it's really hard to answer that only because I'm so close to so many, they're like children. I mean I might have a handful of ten or fifteen that are my favourites to this point. But, I just can't come up with the one, it's just so hard.

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