

Teenage Head: a real band comes to town

by Martin Sullivan

(This review was originally broadcast on CKDU's Early Morning)

On Friday, January 16, **Teenage Head** played at Zapatatas. It's too bad that Halifax will never attract big bands like The Stones, The Clash or Elvis Costello, but if the best we can do is their warm-up bands, it's good that we got such an entertaining band as **Teenage Head**.

One had to keep looking around to remember that this was a nightclub and not a 10,000 seat arena since the band played as if that many people were packed in to hear them.

Many people may not think much of the band, as they neither have 10 hits in the Top 40 nor are they the leaders of underground rock. Maybe these people would feel differently after seeing a live performance, as **Teenage Head** puts out more energy than any other band around.

Frankie Venom, the lead singer, is everything Johnny Rotten ever wanted to be: the man sings, dances, jumps, and even looks like Ian Dury. His stage presence is remarkable and he controls his audience very well. His shouts to "get stinking drunk" are met with a rousing cheer of approval from the crowd.

Following is an interview with Venom and bass player, Steve Mahon.

What influenced your music? Was it rockabilly, rhythm and blues, soul music or what?

Definitely a combination of rockabilly and new wave, but when we were listening to that stuff the term new wave or punk hadn't been involved yet. We were listening to music like MC5, New York Dolls, Iggy and The Stooges, Matt and Hopple that kind of stuff and earlier music: Gene Vincent, Eddie Cochran and Jerry Lee Lewis. We used to play all that and then slowly started playing our own material and it just evolved from there.

Where did you first start out? I think your first album came out in 1977. I'm not too good with dates. I think 1977 was when our first album came out. Before that we were just playing in bars, like the one we're sitting in now, in Southern Ontario, just trying to get a gig anywhere we could get one.

We were very fortunate with Frantic City. I'm sure if you heard the first one, production lacked dreadfully and so it died. With the second album, we had an adequate producer, as opposed to the first time where it was just a mess. Fortunately, it went gold and we started getting better gigs and so here we are.

You had some bad press after last summer at Ontario Place. No one really had a clear idea of what really happened. Was it a matter of people who couldn't get in?

Exactly. What had happened was they didn't feel we could sell the place out. Apparently, fifteen or sixteen thousand people showed up, they closed the gates and about a thousand didn't get in. They eventually crashed the gate and people rushed in. The cops started fighting and people were throwing bricks at cruisers, but it had nothing to do with the band. Inside there were no



problems at all. We weren't aware of it until the next day when we read about it in the papers. It was definitely exploited, it wasn't a riot.

It was more like what happened to The Who at Cincinnati. It was just bad handling by the people running the concert.

Exactly. They didn't hire enough security to handle the situation. It was too bad for them, too bad for us. We got a lot of press out of it, whether being negative or positive. We sold a lot of albums after that.

This is your first time down east?

No, we played in Fredericton in 1978. In Oromocto, what a hellhole! Some scuzzy nightclub—the Riverview Arms.



Why was this engagement a limited one? I thought you were supposed to play for a week?

I can't say anything about that. I didn't know about this gig until Tuesday. They said "You're going to Halifax for a day." We're supposed to be back in a couple of months.

Do you know if you'll play here or somewhere else?

No idea.

There are bigger nightclubs than this like the Misty Moon. That's in Halifax?

Yes. It holds about 2000 people. Really?

It just so happens that they have Levon Helm playing there tonight.

That's why he was on the radio. You didn't seem to hear about our car accident. I was in the front seat, I'm okay. Gordie, our guitarist is still not with us. We have a replacement guitarist, Jimmy. Gordie has his cast off now. He'll be back with us in a few weeks. We also, have an album to do in March.

Another album for Attic Records?

Yes. It's a good company. They're willing to work with the band to get us a re-release in the States or in Europe. We realize that Canada isn't the only place in the world.

You've played a lot of universities in Ontario.

We've played them all. Kids at universities are great. They pack back the beer and really shake the dance floor.

Would you consider playing at Dalhousie?

Things can be worked out. Do they cram the people in here? In Alberta, nobody is allowed to stand. Can they "crowbar" them in here?

Oh, sure.

Take his ten. Get him in! People get off on a packed crowd. I don't mind it as long as I have room to swing.

Do you think commercialism helps you in any way?

We don't like to think of us having to turn commercial just to get our records played. We're not at that stage yet, where we're going to change. Well, maybe a bit! The name of the game is money. Are you aware if we get any commercial airplay?

Oh, yes. "Something on My Mind" received commercial airplay on AM. But, I did notice that you didn't need much advertising to sell this place out. We asked Warren (Melanson) not to oversell the band. The man should be congratulated because he didn't oversell it and set it up just the way we wanted it. I hope you're going to stay for the show because you'll see a pretty honest rock 'n' roll band.

Well, I got free tickets so I'll definitely stay. Thanks very much for your time. Thank you!

Commendations also to the warm-up band, The Slam, for a great prelude to the main act and to Zapatatas for bringing a worthwhile band to this musical wasteland.

Hopefully, we'll see **Teenage Head** returning to Dalhousie in two months to demonstrate that there is life after Minglewood.