

# Conga at the Grawood

**Maracujah**  
The Grawood  
November 29

"Forget your troubles and just dance!" was the feeling that the band Maracujah embodied Friday night at the Grawood. This was a great message to get across to students in serious need of stress relief during the end of term crunch. Infectious Latino rhythms filled the bar as the seven-piece band from Edmonton filled the stage with their frenetic and energetic presence.

Talking to the band between sets, I learned that this was their first tour of the East Coast and only their second show on the tour. They were a little disappointed by the low turnout, but said they may return.

The band consists of a vocalist, guitarist, bassist, drummer,

percussionist, keyboardist, and a sax player. As you can imagine, the stage was full, and in a small venue like the Grawood it was hard to find a seat with a full view of the band. This was too bad because they were as interesting to watch as they were to hear. All of the band members sported different soccer jerseys with the band logo placed somewhere on them. They functioned as a very tight unit and whenever vocalist Christian Mena started jumping, the rest followed, jumping in sync.

They played songs from their self-titled CD, beginning their first set with a catchy little number called "Magic Mushroom" ("Do you believe in magic/ I-I do!"). They also mixed in some covers and some new songs that they had just written. Many of the songs were sung in Spanish, but the words did not matter, it was all about the rhythm.

The meaning was clear: Dance! And with the irresistible beats, about half of the crowd were dancing by the end of the first set. After taking some time out to get re-energized, they returned for a second set that was over an hour long. At the end of the show there

were more people dancing than not, and at one point there was even a conga line circling the Grawood.

My only disappointment with the band was that they did not play very many extended jams — with that many instruments the possibilities should be endless.

I did not know what to expect at the start of the night as I had never seen a band at the Grawood before, and had never heard of Maracujah, but the show turned out to be good, and has gone a little way towards dispelling my prejudices towards the Grawood.

**NEIL FRASER**



# Plumtree, We Love You

**Al Tuck, Mars we love you,**  
**Plumtree**  
Birdland  
November 29

This past Friday three veteran Halifax acts took the stage at the Birdland Cabaret on Brunswick Street. With folk/blues guru Al Tuck opening and the poppy Plumtree closing, the evening promised to be both eclectic and entertaining.

Despite the fact that Al Tuck has been around in one form or another for a few years, I had never actually seen him perform. His style reminded me of Dylan's "Hurricane" days — folk tunes with mumbled and off-key vocals. Tuck relies more on his considerable songwriting skills than technical ability.

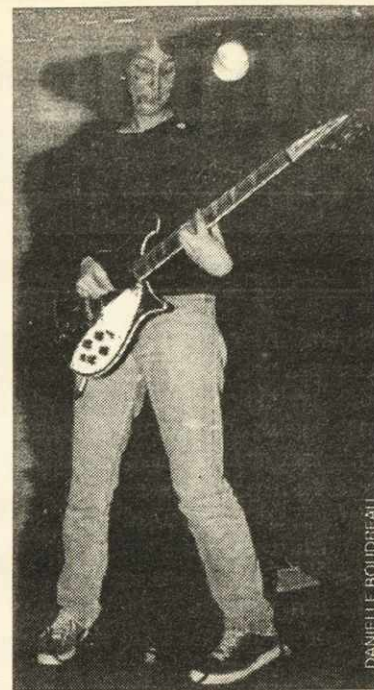
Near the end of his set I found myself with my feet up on the railing, a beer in hand, eyes closed and in the groove. All I needed was an old mutt under my chair and I would have been in backwoods heaven.

Mars We Love You soon broke me out of that state. This Halifax-based quartet started their set with an energetic "Girl's Best Friend" and didn't let up for the duration of the show.

Lately, bands like Mars We Love You have fallen out of fashion in the Halifax music scene. With their thick, overlaid guitar and growling bass, plus the muscular vocals of Launa Amey, they bring to mind the best of mid-eighties guitar "rawk". They confirmed this impression with their faithful rendition of Heart's "Barracuda".

The band was playing at their very limit for speed, which gave the impression that they were constantly on the verge of imploding right on stage. Perhaps if they had slowed down, they could have been tighter — but what they lacked in polish they made up for in style.

Plumtree need not be concerned with either polish or style; they have both in excess. I hadn't seen the



DANIELLE BOUDREAU

band perform live since they acquired a new bassist, Catriona Sturton. The last time I saw them, they sounded as if they had only played together for a month. But on Friday night, I saw a very different band. They grabbed my attention with their opening tune, "New Face" and held it for the rest of show.

Their set was a blend of newer material (some of which still lack names) and songs from their recordings. Notable among these was a rework of "The Phone, The Phone" with a "heavy metal" guitar sound.

All four members share vocal duties and harmonize well, which is a plus since individually they do not have very strong voices. They opened one song with the tightest harmonies I've ever heard from a local band. It seems that Plumtree's frequent tours have paid off in this respect.

The band's music has changed along with their expertise. Where before they seemed to deserve the much-loathed "cute" label, now they have a definite edge to their performance. Sure, the songs are still fun and happy, but now they are played with a strength and confidence that was not there last year.

Also, they looked more comfortable on stage. They seemed happy to be there, and relaxed enough to talk with the audience. Unfortunately, I couldn't understand what the heck they were saying.

It's been quite awhile since I have seen a show I've enjoyed so much, from opening act to closing encore. All three acts have room to improve, and I will enjoy watching and listening to them in the future.

**MARK REYNOLDS**



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