

Arts

Water Street and Exodus put life in Halifax live scene

by Micael Brennan

I wanna talk about black music and say, "Hooray, there's really something out there" in Halifax. It figures, as Gottingen St. is hardly the nicest part of Halifax. First and foremost there is the almost new Water Street Blues Band (still with Joe Murphy, of course).

Slightly revamped and funk

up, the Water Street Blues Band has a great new E.P. in local record stores. With Murphy on vocals, harmonica and guitar, Ian O'Donnell on drums and Seymour Grant on guitar, the band has added guitarist Carson Downy, saxophonist Bucky Adams and trumpeter Grady Lett. It has made a real difference and one that I like.

Their music's still mostly blues but with the horns and Carson Downy's great rhythm guitar and screaming lead solos there's a stronger rhythm and blues feel. And, when Buck Adams is with them, his wonderfully deep, gutsy tenor sax makes it pure soul. Blues, rhythm and blues, soul, or whatever, this is just good rocking

music that comes for the sheer joy of it. No pretenses here, these guys just move.

I saw them a few weeks ago at Zapatas (a great place to see a band, by the way) and I loved it. Joe Murphy is still in command and his voice is doubled as ever but that strength is doubled now with the newer players. Carson Downy is quite visual and alive with his guitar. It was obvious he wanted to turn it up all the way. I bet he cranks out Jimi Hendrix when he's alone in his room. In contrast, Seymour Grant plays very quietly with a subtler intensity but is no less powerful. For me the best numbers were "Soul Man" and "In the Midnight Hour", which I was at first surprised to hear Water St. play. Sam & Dave and Wilson Pickett were done justice — it's enough to say that.

E.P.

The electricity of the live performance isn't as high on the E.P. and Murphy's voice isn't quite as strong as it usually is on stage but there's a magic to their record that's undeniable. It's the warmth and sad craziness of the blues that comes off this record like heat. Two of the four songs are especially great. "Can't change My Mind", and, "Drowning on Dry Land", are true gems with real soul urge. Both are slow, jazzy blues numbers that express a wonderful longing and sad joy. The band makes them absolutely their own. Murphy's voice, Grady's guitar, and Bucky Adam's sax are perfect. "Can't Be Satisfied", and "Rocket 88" are lighter, more ordinary blues pieces which lack distinction, but after the other numbers you can't expect the same power. They're solid rockers, though, and I like them. Joe Murphy and the Water Street Blues Band sing the blues, the real blues that all great black music is about from Louis Armstrong to disco funk. So remember, their record is in the stores — you gotta support the few true artists around here. As for white music, I've been waiting to hear a new rock and roll band in Halifax for long enough now and I think it's time to give up. There's no funky punk or punky

funk to be found around here as far as I can see and if there is, it doesn't get past the basement. There's just no serious enough about new music in Halifax to make a real go of it. We have plenty of professional copy bands and no professional rock and roll artists.

That's too bad.

Halifax can't expect to produce the Clash but I would expect something like Teenage Head, a band that's out there making a living and a name playing its own unique rock and roll. They are professional artists and Halifax is an amateurs' town without even an honest amateur punk band.

Exodus

Another group I'd like to mention is *Exodus*, a reggae band who played around here a lot this summer. They've been together for a year now and have become a pretty tight outfit musically. With Conrad Thomas on lead vocals and keyboards, Dave Phillips on lead guitar, Jerome Thomas on drums and new member Leo the Bassman, *Exodus* creates a very strong reggae rhythm. They move off and respond to each other easily.

Thomas is an especially strong drummer, always right on top of the beat and constantly adding fills and off-rhythms. He's up-front, tight, and sharp, the way a good reggae drummer has to be. I also like Phillips on guitar, his solos are delicate and moving. They're unquestionably all very adept musicians. They perform six or seven originals and cover Dennis Brown and Bob Marley as well.

The thing that keeps me from being very excited about *Exodus* is beyond their musicianship and rhythmic charm, there's no real individual or distinct personality to them. They have no raw strength or single power. As an ordinary copy band, they're good though. They play the music they like without pretension and with a lot of respect toward it. I'm glad they're around.

They're Halifax's first reggae group and because of them maybe someone else will have the courage to play some real roots reggae too.

Stray Cats struttin' with speed

by Bryan Fantie

Stray Cats are the latest group of 'dirty white boys' who have made a big splash playing that 'nig-roh' music ... at least that's how they would have been described if *Stray Cats* had made their debut twenty-five years ago.

The precedent for this musical miscegenation was set long ago and has been exploited successfully many times since. We've had Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis, The Beatles, Rolling Stones, and even Tom Jones. Some of these artists blended their country and western roots with the R&B and gave birth to Rockabilly. Time flew. Buddy Holly and Eddie Cochran went out in respective fiery flashes. Britain invaded. New Waves rose.

I suppose, at first glance, many would be inclined to classify *Stray Cats* as neo-rockabilly. It's amazing how we all have this great need to tuck things away in cognitive filing cabinets. Well, I think it's quite fitting to knock the dust off the old vernacular for these guys. They deserve it.

No one since Robert Gordon has managed to actually capture that old, authentic sound and feeling. Don't get me wrong, this isn't mere revivalism. We're not dealing with any reactionary throwbacks. Take it from someone who is, unfortunately, old enough to remember. *Stray Cats* are the real thing and they are creating a massive aura of *deja vu*.

Their debut album, *BUILT FOR SPEED*, takes up where all those other guys left off. Most of the numbers (all under 3½ minutes) are written by guitarist and lead vocal-



ist, Brian Setzer. They do tip their figurative musical hats to one of their cultural ancestors by closing the album with Johnny Burnette's *BABY BLUE EYES*.

Most of the songs are variations on the 12-bar blues but they're played with the raw energy and conviction of a band who do not separate their music from their life.

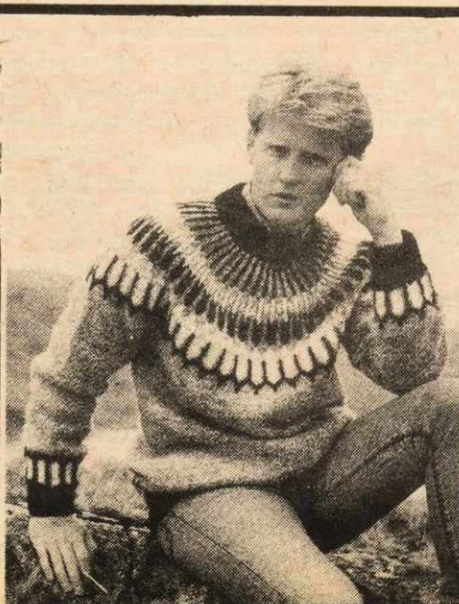
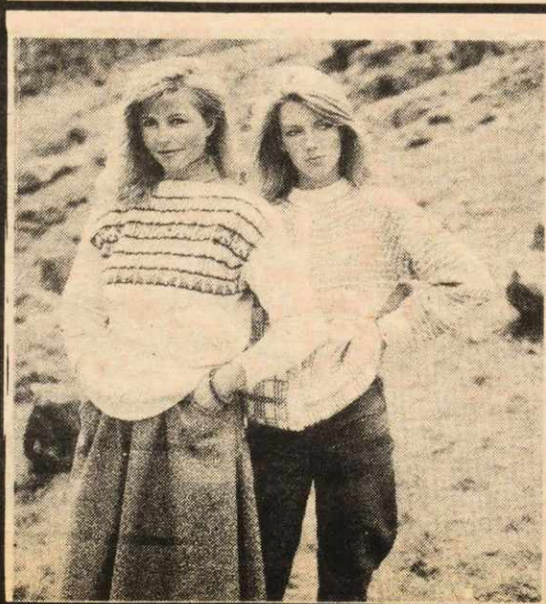
They are still proverbial 'diamonds in the rough'. Their execution is crude but this studio-produced album has a 'live' sound to it. I swear I can even hear the tube distortion on the guitar tracks that could only be produced by those vintage white Fender amps which gave the 'balls' to the licks of

those old blues guitarists.

Judging by the numbers that he produced, including the AM hit 'STRAY CAT STRUT', Dave Edmunds just might be the catalyst the band needs to get the *STRAY CATS* explosion started.

BUILT FOR SPEED is an album that should get those who like to dance rockin' and rollin'. It's an album that should be played again and again. I hope Brian Setzer, Slim Jim Phantom, and Lee Rocker can keep strumming & crooning, banging and yelling, and slapping & howling with the same power and a little more polish.

I love it. But it's all rock and roll to me.



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