

The Box Rocks

by Mark Earhard

Wednesday, September 5, Dalhousie students were treated to an outstanding performance by one of Canada's finest bands, the Box, playing to a capacity crowd, rocked the McGuinness room in fine style.

This is the third time The Box has been to Halifax in support of their latest album *The Pleasure and The Pain*. The band seems to put on a tighter performance every pass through. From the *Misty Moon* to the *Concert on the Hill* (attended by an enormous crowd),

and then to the McGuinness room, seems like jumping up in venue and then stepping back.

But no matter the size of the audience. The box put on an excellent show. It is an animate performance, with a sound that is as good as it is gets. The theatrics come primarily from Jean Marc. As lead vocalist, Jean Marc seems to take the energy of the band and the focus it directly into the audience. In contrast, the rest of the band members seem to tune out the world around them. This is especially true for Claude Thibault, lead guitarist, who appears almost shy on stage.

The sounds that are created by these four musicians are to be experienced live, where one views first hand the connectivity among the members of this group. From the unique guitar style of Thibault, to the sweet harmonies of Guido Pisapia's keyboards, the individual band members seem to come "closer together" when the first note is struck.

The focus of The Box tends to

be on overlying harmonies, with Pisapia's keyboards and Thibault's guitar providing the main support for Jean Marc. This is also evident with Jean-Pierre Brie who runs fluently through bass changes, keeping with the harmonic style of the rest of the band. All in all The Box has a clean, fresh sound, that supports Jean Marc, who has the unique ability to vocally link the band with the audience.

Every once in a while a French

simply titles: *The Box*

lyric is incorporated into a song for a blend of languages that is unusual in North American pop music. The Box adds this interesting flair, never making the language transition overly difficult. It seems to be a reminder to the listener that this band, hailing from Quebec, is truly Canadian, recognizing not just an Anglo audience, but the large bilingual population that listens to this country's music.

The Box is surely being catapulted into Canadian superstardom. The last album, *Closer Together*, was a great success, with much radio time, and a new album is, if anything, a superior effort. This being the third time The Box has played Halifax on this tour, and from interviews at one of its favorite cities in which to play, and from the reaction of audiences around town, the affection is mutual.



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A breath of Rare Air

by Jeremy Robinson

Ahh ... there's nothing like a breath of Rare Air.

The Toronto quintet returned to Pub Flamingo this weekend and enchanted yet another audience with their mystical blend of groovy sophistication.

The lineup has changed since the last time Rare Air was in town. Founding members and multi-instrumentalists Grier Coppins and Pat O'Gorman are now joined by Rich Gorman on drums, Christian Frappier on bass and

Jeff Gill on guitar. The band played two sets of highly diverse material including seven tunes off their latest release entitled *Primeval*. It is Rare Air's sixth album since their start 12 years ago.

Trying to put a finger on Rare Air's appeal tends to send a stream of metaphors racing through one's head rather than a list of musical styles. O'Gorman's own introductions range from "a psychedelic Indian Rio" to a Chicago shopping mall. The whole experience is like riding a breath of fresh

air as it spans the globe, sailing in and out of the lungs of different peoples and cultures.

Rare Air's unique instrumentation features bagpipes, penny whistles, a wood flute, and a bombarbe (sort of like a primitive oboe) as well as more standard elements like keyboards, bass, guitar, and drums. Greenspoon, Frappier, and Gill built richly textured grooves that spanned rock, jazz, country, and even acid-funk, often simultaneously. Over the top, Coppins and O'Gorman

drew from their mixed bag of instruments to create sounds that were fresh and intriguing: somewhere between psychedelia and the Star Wars cantina band.

Bagpipes are definitely a large part of the Rare Air sound and provide some of the evening's most uplifting moments. Despite their beginnings in the legion bagpipe corps, Coppins and O'Gorman have largely redefined the instrument by avoiding its traditional Celtic roots and presenting it in a context that is much more rhythmic and modal. Says Coppins, "The limited tonal range of the instruments provides a real challenge in trying to come up with a new and interesting sound. Sometimes we'll play over a key that wouldn't normally fit with the instrument, and that gives it a different feel and opens up more possibilities."

The highlights of the show came at the close of each set. "New Swing Reel" (off *Primeval*) and "Space Piper" both featured syn-copated dual bagpipes layered over a delicious jazz/funk sound. By the end there were a number of new age explorers on the dance floor. They were inspired to move their bodies in brave new ways.

Still searching for a catch-word after the concert had ended, I ventured back stage to confront the band. "Entropy" spurted out Coppins. "Anti-entropy" insisted O'Gorman. Well, that summed it up nicely: duelling elements. All I needed then was a dictionary...



Rare Air: unique instrumentation

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