

# Yo Canada!

## An urban explosion changes the face of Canadian music

BY MATT GREENWOOD

TORONTO (CUP) — It's not just rock n' roll anymore.

The Horseshoe, a Canadian rock institution that has hosted the likes of the Rolling Stones, the Police and the Eurythmics, can testify that the country's music scene is finally responding to change.

For the first time in the downtown Toronto nightclub's history, last Thursday night its stage belonged to an MC — Maestro.

When the hip-hop godfather exploded onto the scene back in 1989 with his chart-topping classic "Let Your Backbone Slide", he was doing more than providing a radio-friendly anthem for hip-hop listeners across Canada — he was changing the face of Canadian music all together.

His recent performance during Canada Music Week proves just how far the urbanization of this industry has come in a decade.

"It shows that the mainstream rock scene is willing to accept a hip-hop act," says Mike McCann, news editor for *Chart* magazine.

"This is ten years in the works for Maestro to come and do a show like this at a traditional rock n' roll venue, but I don't think anybody is going to bat an eye."

The identity of Canadian popular music has long been defined by its "roots rock" sound with the occasional "arena rock" thrown into the mix. Stompin' Tom, Anne Murray and even K.D. Lang are performers who have characterized Canadian music as a rural, folk-driven aesthetic, largely composed of anthems musing on everything culturally specific from hockey to fishing.

But the Canadian urban music underground is slowly changing that impression.

"Urban music is still in its embryonic stage in Canada," says Maestro.

Hiphop, a music born and refined in the city, has the potential to have a great impact on the definition of Canadian music, much like it has had in the United States.

"Hiphop is our version of folk," notes Maestro.

Hiphop and traditional roots, or folk rock, have much in common, speaking to people on a personal and genuine level. And while hiphop and urban music speaks to Canadians in as powerful a manner as traditional Canadian pop music, it has only recently garnered the same attention.

Still, the transition from folk-rock to the urban sound is moving slowly.

"So far the effect has been limited," says Sean Robb, *Chart's* urban music specialist.

While hiphop is the mainstream pop music in the U.S., Canadian pop is still dominated by rock.

But not for long, Robb predicts.

"Within a few years, that's very likely to change."

MuchMusic, Canada's all-music-video-all-the-time TV station, may play a large role in whether or not hiphop's effect is felt in the industry. The station heavily promotes hiphop music, accounting for 60 or 70 percent of the videos played. It also plays a lot of independent Canadian hiphop artists.

Events such as Canada Music Week are also important. Last year's festival highlighted urban outfits like the Northern Touch All-Stars and Bran Van 3000, while the week's keynote speech came from infamous Public Enemy frontman Chuck D.

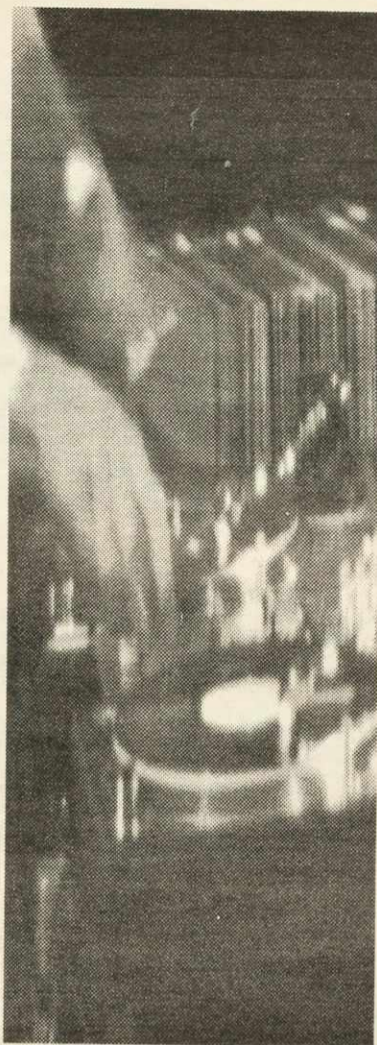
This year, Maestro, Ghetto Concept and the Circle (featuring some of the Northern Touch crew) are among the roster.

Yet more needs to be done for urban music to really anchor itself in the country. Robb and Maestro both agree that increased radio support is vital to the growth of urban music in Canada.

Toronto's new Kiss 92.5 FM follows on the heels of a handful of urban and hiphop stations whose company includes Energy 108 FM and the all-black

WBLK 93.7 FM.

The support of Canadian labels is also necessary. Only two Canadian urban acts, Maestro and the Rascalz, have been signed to a



major record label.

Most hiphop records are being produced through independent labels such as Beat Factory. While Ghetto Concept won back to back Juno awards for Best Rap Recording in 1994 and 1995, the crew has yet to land a major record label deal — a point that represents the problem that has stunted the fruition of Canada's hiphop scene.

"Popular Canadian urban music acts do not get the record deals that a Canadian rock band of equal popularity will get," says Robb.

But times are changing. Universal Concerts, the largest North American live performance promoter, is currently working on a large profile national tour for the summer, possibly with Maestro and the Rascalz playing urban centres from coast to coast.

Even though the music is still in its infancy, the pieces are in place for an urban explosion in a country long-defined by its rock and folk heritage.

In a nation priding itself on diversity, it only seems fitting that an urban awareness that began a decade earlier is slowly solidifying itself into our national consciousness.

Maestro puts it bluntly: "Hiphop was built to last."

# Joining the guild of poets

## An evening with David Zieroth

BY ANDREA FOSTER

Having never been to a poetry reading before, I had visions of bearded professors sucking on pipes, and eccentric women with wild hair and glazed eyes all gathered 'round a prolific speaker.

Except for a couple of bearded men, that was not the scene last Thursday, at David Zieroth's reading from his new book, *How I Joined Humanity at Last*.

Undoubtedly one of Canada's finest poets, David's both touching and humorous book takes readers on a journey through his midlife quest for renewal. I was lucky enough to be one of those travellers, with the author as my personal tour guide.

About a dozen of us took shelter from the rain to relax our minds and open our hearts to David's world. I must say, the sprinkling of rain on the rooftop, dim lighting and the velvet couch that embraced my tired bones set the scene for a very relaxing evening.

After a short introduction David began reciting his poetry, first from his new book and then some more recent work. His poetry ranged from melancholy to comical with a few poems that were so touching I felt like I was witnessing the events David was recalling.

Now a resident of North Vancouver and teacher of creative writing at Douglas College, David's poems were resonant of both his current life and his youth spent in Manitoba. We were a captivated audience. Personally, David's voice reminded me of my grandpa's —

the type that is so soothing I find myself hanging on every last word.

As he recited I realized that poetry is not simply the catalogue of another's experiences, but rather it is a personal journey from within.

David's poems sparked memories of my own past and invoked questions of my own future.

That is the inherent beauty in poetry. When one brings their thoughts to life, the beholder often finds a reflection significant to their own experiences. Poetry probes thought, and by writing on such a personal level, Zieroth makes it easy for his readers to depart on their own personal journey.

David's advice to aspiring poets: write from your heart. Honesty is the key when it comes to recounting personal thoughts. David has written five books, but feels that he never reached true clarity until he received a letter from his father that evoked memories from his childhood. Going back to his roots, David recalled, was the pivotal point in his writing. It allowed him to "soul search free of external influence".

At the end of the evening I reluctantly collected my things and prepared to brave the nasty weather. But, to my surprise, the rain had ceased and I was able to stretch the night's events out a bit longer.

As I pondered David's advice, I realized I have always enjoyed poetry, but have always resisted the urge to document my thoughts. After such an enlightening evening with David Zieroth, I just might see what I can come up with.

# Arabian Night a huge success

BY SEAN WINSTANLEY

On Sunday, Mar. 7, the Dalhousie Arabic Society held their third annual Arabian Night celebrating the vast wealth of Arabic culture. Arabian Night is one of the few bona fide opportunities to learn something about one of Dalhousie's most visible and active societies.

The event was held in the McInnes room of the Student Union Building. The six-hour show began with a fashion show, showcasing the more typical types of traditional dress that Western society envisions when they think about Arab culture. I particularly liked the Egyptian dancer dressed in a head dress

similar to that found in a sarcophagus.

Perhaps the most intriguing part of the evening came when dinner was served. I had taken the time to look over the menu beforehand, but the only item I recognized was humus. A vegetarian and a non-veg plate were offered and I chose the non-veg. When the food came, I found the vast majority of the cuisine to be quite tasty. So much in fact that I would consider going again, just to sample some more.

As the evening progressed it became quite clear that dancing plays an important role in Arabic society. The Lebanese dance appeared to be the most fun for

those participating. The 10 or 12 dancers were on stage for almost 15 minutes, and the smiles never faded off their faces. All the dancers played their role with great pride. This was evident in the reaction they received from the crowd following each dance.

The evening's grand finale was a music video depicting the struggles the Arabic people have endured over the past 50 years. The images of war and starvation were quite moving. Many of the nearly 600 people in attendance were brought to tears.

After all was said and done, I would say the third annual Dalhousie Arabian Night was a huge success.



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<b>TORONTO</b>	—	16:00	—	15:50	16:00	—	—
<b>ST. JOHN'S</b>	—	06:00	—	06:00	—	—	—
		11:05	—	10:25	—	—	—
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