

## FOCUS ON MONTREAL MUSIC

by Bruce Denis

Montreal is a victim of politics. It teeters on the tight rope of bills 101 and 178 and until someone places a safety net underneath it will be a red light district to every record label from the majors to the indies.

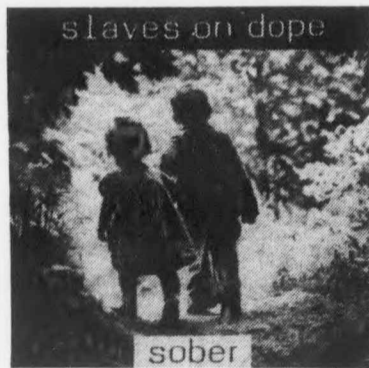
As a result, local scenesters have given the industry the old 'fuck you' by starting their own labels. In the last two years, old labels have grown and new labels have appeared, as well, the Coalition of Montreal Musicians has been organized to help local bands find concert venues, practice space and even studio time.

The recent success of the Doughboys, Bootsauce and Me, Mom and Morgentaler have set a precedent for newly established bands like Bite, Tinker, Steller Dweller and Pest. Tinker opened for Smashing Pumpkins before 2000 people at Metropolis in October and filled the same slot for Love Battery a week later at Club Woodstock. Bite released a demo cassette over the summer which sold out and are slated for bigger and better things on the local 'Derivative' label. Stellar Dweller have a full length album in the works due out in late spring while Pest is the experiment of local whiz producer

Shadz of Culture, the coolest militant hip-hop trio this side of the border, also made waves throughout the industry when they opened for Bad Brains at the sold out Metropolis. And Merlin, the former Manhattanite who now resides in Lachute, Que, wrote, recorded and distributed his own solo album of the most unique techno-hip-hop-core music imaginable and caught the eye of local promoters during his opening slot for the Doughboys.

Beneath these consulats of Montreal rock are the up-and-comings including Slaves On Dope, who released their debut 6 song EP at Fofoufoues Electriques a few weeks ago, Man Bites Dogma and two 'En Guard' protégés Les Bons A Riens and The Local Rabbits.

Unfortunately there is no common thread which links these four bands together beyond being from Montreal but because they happen to have found their way into my hands hence, I will review them for you.



Slaves On Dope  
*Sober*  
(Uplift Records)

Hot Spots: Tearing The Seams, Yourself, Smell the Sky, Brass. Bottom Line: Solid debut.

Sober is a 6 song EP that has brought SoD to the forefront of the underground scene in Montreal. Jason Rockman's rich and powerful voice is coupled with a wall of surreal guitar to produce an interestingly familiar sound. The quality of production is outstanding considering the Slaves recorded it themselves at Studio 408.

After a cliché 10 second count-

down, the band blasts into 'Tearing the Seams', a power tune that fuses hard-rock and rap to the poetically mundane lyrics. 'Calmly', 'Yourself', and 'Roger' echo the opener until the acoustic 'Smell the sky' breaks the speed and noise. 'Brass' rounds off a solid debut by the quartet.

Guitarist Kevin Jardine, bassist Patrick Francis and drummer Lenny Vortanian show particular savvy with their instruments. It's hard to call a band this talented anything but great. It's too bad they had to spoil this gem with a few cheesy words (expletive included) for their fans at the end of the CD. Whaddya think of that, boys?



Man Bites Dogma  
*Bone*

Hot Spots: What Does It Take, Wish, Somedays. Bottom Line: A good home project.

Imagine Michael Stripe singing with the power of Eddie Vedder's voice and you've approximated vocalist Domenik Yoney's croon. Put it to a background of fairly conventional guitar heavy progressive rock and voilà! Man Bites Dogma.

Aside from noticing their catchy name in the local independent rags every so often, I don't know much about this band. Bone, their debut, is a five song cassette entirely created and produced by themselves and again, the quality is exceptional. Yoney's voice has no trouble soaring above the collective noise of guitarist Mike Carener, bassist Gualter Azevedo and drummer Tony Labao.

Three of the five songs on this EP are fairly strong and feature some attractive hooks, however, the two remaining songs stick out like a sore thumb. While I admire the ebony-ivory social consciousness of 'What? White!', it lacks punch and maturity. The same can be said for 'A Bigger Fishbowl'.

This is a nice cassette for the band to throw into a portfolio when they're looking for gigs but it's not worth running to the store to get. No doubt Man Bites Dogma will be around for another while, but don't expect to see them on a major label.

Les Bon À Riens  
*Adviene Que Pour*  
rEn Guard/Cargo

Hot Spots: Ch't Ecoeuré, Dommage Collatéraux, Gros Cochons, Les Pines. Bottom Line: Incroyable!

Who said Punk is dead? After listening to this 17 song CD I have to say "Moi, ch't'un bon à rien!" It's filled with politically motivated French-Canadian power-punk. If DOA were to cover Indochine it would probably sound a lot like 'Adviene que Pour!'.

Hailing from the Franco-burb of Longueuil on the South Shore, Les Bon à Riens are militantly political with a



healthy social conscience to boot. This album explodes with ditties played as fast as they can be played given basic human limitations. Daniel Gastro grows out the lyrics almost incoherently. Thank god they included the words in the liner notes or this ignorant anglophone would have had a hard time deciphering them.

Much of the messages are essential to Quebec culture. 'Les Pines' is a succinct cry against violence against women that uses Marc Lépine as a counter-icton. 'Image De Carnage', similarly, is about the horror of the Montreal Massacre at the Université de Montréal. Don't let Gastro's howling fool you, he's got a heart of gold and shows it in Gros Cochon, a hilariously haunting ditty about macho shithead males. Be careful not to miss the cynicism and sarcasm of his writing.

Musically, the band has an excellent mastery of its trade but over 17 songs the hard hitting format becomes a bit monotonous. This album is refreshing not only because of the intricate lyrics but also because it's french. Say what you want in English, it always sounds better in French. Achète cette colis de disque!



The Local Rabbits  
*The Super-Duper EP*  
(En Guard/Cargo)

Hot Spots: Shot Me Down, Cuttin' Out. Bottom Line: As cheesy as the name suggests.

No surprise that this band hails from the boony suburb of Pointe Claire. The Local Rabbits' cheesy brand of classic rock is overshadowed by their light-hearted command of the blues.

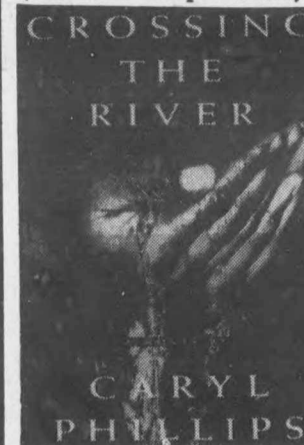
Over the first four songs, the band sounds young and immature despite the strength of the hook laden Shot Me Down. Then they slide into a cover of Walter Jacobs' 'Cuttin' Out', a blues based swing that fits the band like a glove. They follow up with their own blues take Hole In My Shoe. Guitarist Ben Cunning dawns the bottle neck for this one and slides his way to a warm bluesy sound that defies the pale colour of his skin.

This band should drop their half-assed attempt to become a classic rock band and concentrate on their niche for the blues. Hey, if I lived in Pointe Claire, I'd have a niche for the blues too.

### BOOK REVIEW

## Caryl Phillips *Crossing the River*

(Alfred A. Knopf Canada)



A desperate foolishness. The crops failed. I sold my children.'

The first line of Caryl Phillips' new novel captures the senses of both loss and betrayal that permeate this work. Several vignettes, each with a different setting and historical scope, relate Phillip's vision of the effects of the diaspora of the African nation on both the black and non-black populations of this world.

The episodes vary from a series of delicious deathbed hallucinations experienced by a runaway slave in the early West to a tender WWII romance between an Englishwoman and a black American soldier stationed overseas. The themes of loss

and degradation are often strengthened by the motif of the lost child and through powerful and often disturbing visual images. Phillips' simple and concise language drives home the paradoxically morbid and haunting yet uplifting and hopeful themes of this novel with great effect.

The novel's prologue mourns the loss of the children of Africa and offers little hope of redemption and salvation. The narrative transforms this hopelessness into a sad but serene celebration of Black dreams and accomplishments in an epilogue that not so much closes this powerful collection of stories, but rather marks a series of new beginnings and opens the door to hope.

*Crossing the River* is not a landmark work in this literary genre. It is however a well-constructed tale of grief, loss and hardship that applies well to events beyond the scope of its intended focus. The microcosmic settings and the symbolic characters leave the reader both captivated and undeniably upset about the injustices of the institution of slavery and its impact on the modern world.

-Dean Culligan

## Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast)

This is part of a series of profiles of some African countries brought to you by courtesy of African High Commissions and Embassies in Canada. The information in these articles will be the main source for questions to a quiz on February 18. Winners will be announced at the Africa Nite celebrations on February 19.

Côte d'Ivoire is located on the west coast of Africa, between the 4th and 10th parallels and the 8th and 9th meridians. It is bordered to the west by Liberia and Guinea, to the north by Mali and Burkina-Faso, to the east by Ghana, and to the south by the sea (Gulf of Guinea). The countryside is divided between the savannah to the north, the savannah in the centre, and dense forests to the south. The southern part of the country is fairly flat, while in the north mountains rise to a height of over 5,000 feet. Wide rivers irrigate the country, though not very navigable, they are major attractions. Main rivers include the Sassandra, the Bandama and the Camoé Rivers. The southern coast has a vast chain of lagoons running from the Ghana border to beyond Jacqueville.

Area: 124,504 sq. miles; Population: 11 million (60 ethnic groups); Major Religions: Roman Catholicism, Islam, animist religions; Administrative Capital: Yamoussoukro; Economic Capital: Abidjan; Resources: Cocoa (world's largest producer), coffee (ranked third), pineapples,

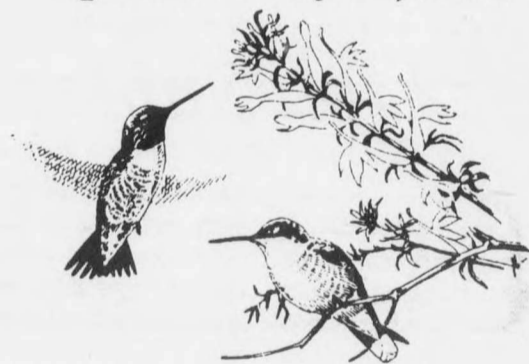
sugar, cotton oil, rubber and wood; Language: French.

Abidjan, "pearl of the lagoons", as the country's economic capital, launches futurist buildings of steel and glass into the sky, becoming a tropical Manhattan, yet there is also Treichville, with its thousands of boutiques, its music which cadences life as soon as night has fallen. Africa's "Treich" is where all races throughout the world come together, where you can find everything. Reputable spots for sampling giant prawns or "chicken bicyclette" cooked over coals, brilliant and bustling markets, the thudding sound of Dan dancers on the cobblestones.

But the beauty and attraction of towns and villages in the interior are also worth discovering, with their traditional architecture. Such as the earthen village of Senoufo, the lakeside village of Tagba, the fortified soukous of the Lobi tribe or, to the west, the Dioulas' grainlofts built on piles... Experience the intense spectacle of traditional dances, for everythings here begins and ends with amazing performances: generational celebrations in the central village of Ebré, Goli and Zaouli, the mask festival at Guiglo, the "Niyogu" at Boundiali, "Koman" at Odienné, the wader or Knife Dance at Man, not to mention the jealously guarded rituals and ceremonies of the Indéné and Abron kingdoms.

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