

The Grapes Of Wrath Sell Their Wares at The Farmer's Market

"Wow, I wish we had a place like this when I was a kid! Cool!" - I am inclined to agree with Mr. Hooper. The Grapes of Wrath played Wednesday night at the Boyce Farmers Market (What?!) - yeah, the Boyce Farmers Market - amidst the wooden beams, paper signs advertising whole grain breads, and a floor stained with many Saturday's butchered hogs, spring rolls and Harry Marshall's special blend.

Something about that place made the whole show sparkle in a way it really had no business doing. The Grapes, touring on their relatively new release 'These Days' we're here on campus a month ago, and I was truly saddened by what I thought was a digression in composition by the band - sequenced, synthesized - all the elements that to me, anyway, turn a band into pop rock of the most formulaic and irritating type. I listened with interest and appreciation however, to what wafted through the rustic rafters of the Farmer's Market on Wednesday. Maybe it was the fact that their production was cut in half by the limited size of the venue. Possibly. Maybe it was simply the acoustics and feel of the place. Maybe. What came out of the stacks that night was completely different that what I am hearing on These Days. Hard-edged, raspy, like an old forty-five, the music scraped along the cinder-block walls of the Market hall, sanding away the pretensions of the over-produced tracks on These Days.

The Grapes, I think, had fun for a change. The West-coast vegetarian attitude (thanks Dave) that so many Canadian bands have (54 40, Grapes of Wrath, etc.) seemed to melt away. The guys actually spoke to the crowd in a non-condescending manner, and had some fun with tracks off the old albums, playing Peace of Mind, Backwards Town, and even something from their very first release, Misunderstanding, which they seemed to enjoy playing much more than any of the newer compositions. The crowd was small and relatively unappreciative, but I get the feeling that the whole thing was a bit of a nostalgia trip for a band that is getting its feet into the higher-levels of rock and roll production now. They really enjoyed it. I think I believe that.

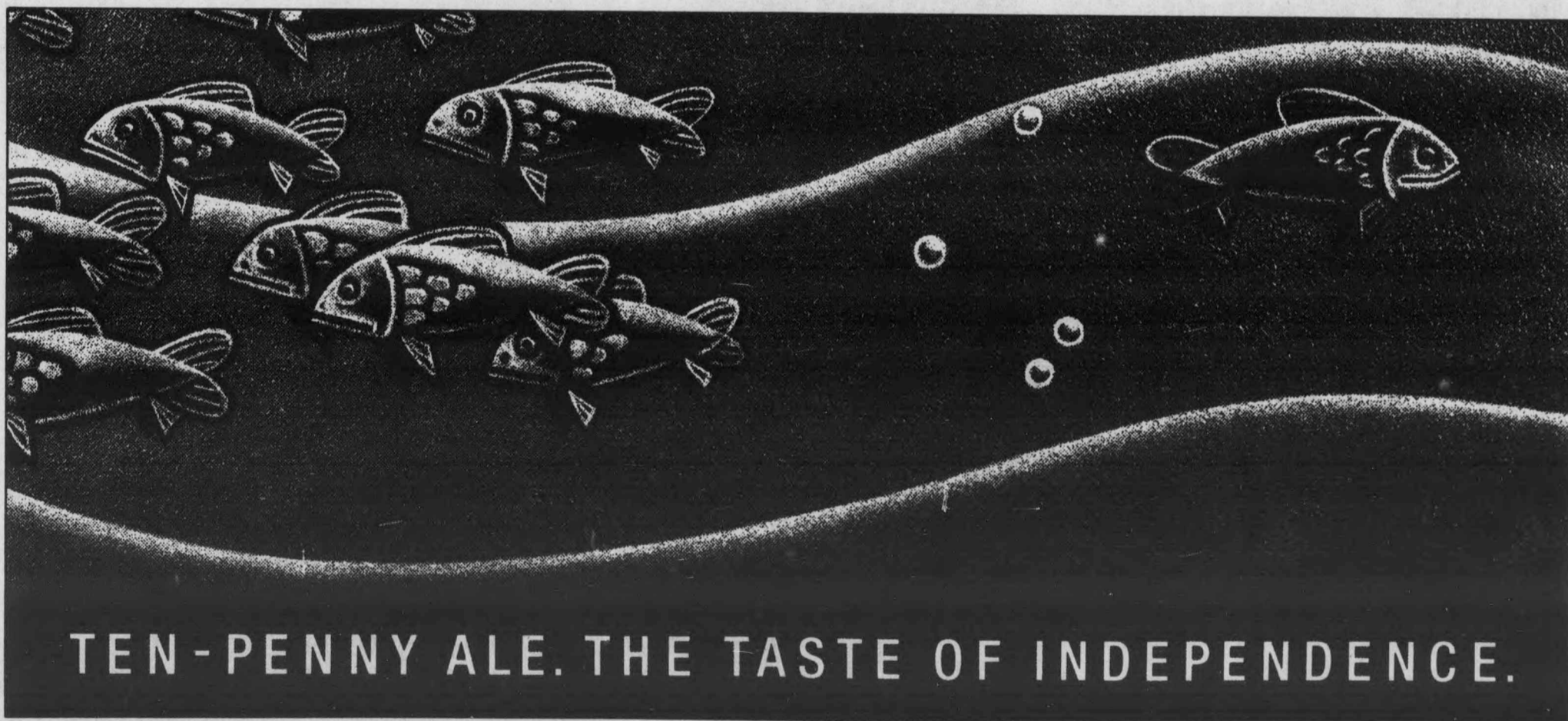
As to the newer material, I did listen to it in a different light as a result of all this. I think people will look back on the late 80's and early 90's as a kind of Beatles revival period. Lenny Kravitz has made a career using chord progressions and bass line styles invented by McCartney and Lennon, and many others are jumping on the band wagon (pun intended). Most prominent in this field for the Grapes was a track called I Can't Find My way Home, a ballad with pleasant structure and the even, complementary vocal harmonies we've come to expect from the Grapes - Tom Hooper (bass) and Kevin Kane (lead guitar) swap vocal lines indistinguishably, flowing over and around each other in a way that makes bands like REM so wonderful to listen to.

The most disappointing moment was when keyboardist Vincent Jones, who, up until this point had been banging away on his digital piano in raucous, thoroughly enjoyable solos reminiscent of something between country, funk, and Bruce Hornsby, slapped on the headphones for an over-done sequenced journey into the poppiest of the love-junk ditties on These Days, a track called I'll Be There - not surprisingly the biggest selling track of the new album.

I had fun. The band played too short a set for eleven bucks (I think), but what time was spent was quality, and I believe rewarding. A few times I really thought that the band was going to "win over" the crowd - not for lack of trying. There was just something really pleasantly wholesome about the whole thing - no drunken fools, fascist security, or sweaty, clinging locker room odor - just a very homey venue, a varied crowd, two Fredericton cops (who even seemed to be enjoying themselves) and fresh-squeezed orange juice being sold in the corner. Let's do it again, Fredericton.

I should thank Chris Vautour for organizing this, and CIHI for having the balls to sponsor it. So I will. Thanks. Do it again. Fredericton needs more of this to bring entertainment of this calibre to the large section of the population we, as a university community are forced to ignore due to the incomprehensibly inane liquor laws and such that tend to wall in anything that happens here. Bravo.

Chris Hunt



TEN-PENNY ALE. THE TASTE OF INDEPENDENCE.