

Friday, 1:00 p.m. Gravitee Restaurant
Hedge/Cleveland Steamer/Madhat/
Orange Glass/Spaceneedle

I got to the Gravitee Restaurant, a place I didn't even know existed until two days before the show, at about 1:45 p.m. (Hey, I had class until 1:30!). Needless to say I missed the opening band, **Hedge**.

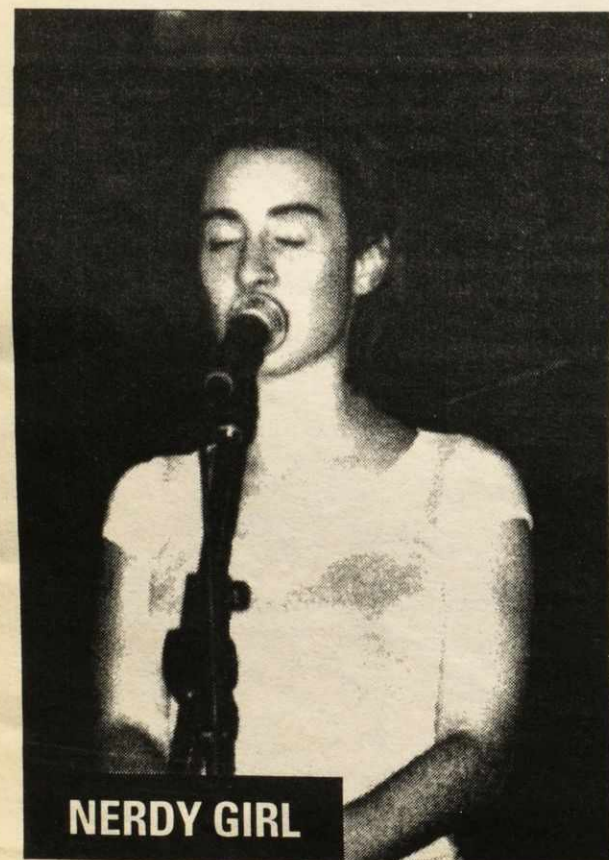
Madhat took the stage first (at least from my point of view) and played old stuff and new stuff and everything in between. From their song off the *No Class* compilation to some songs from their yet-to-be-released-because-there's-no-art-work CD to lots of stuff from their cassette-only release *Break*, they put on a really good set, despite an alternate guitar player. Maybe that helped them, because they played with more energy than any of the previous times I had seen them.

Cleveland Steamer were next. This is a band that I'm sorry I haven't seen more often. Really fast, aggressive, and perhaps a touch of angst. At times, comparable to Purple Knight meets Fugazi on speed. Loud, raunchy pop songs, to which a recording probably wouldn't do justice. See them if you haven't already; if you have...see them again.

The highlight of the show for me was seeing **Orange Glass**, one of the newer bands from the Moncton scene. These guys write the same brand of sweet, catchy music as fellow Moncton band Eric's Trip. During the show, they played songs from their self-titled, 4-song 7" and lots of new stuff that I hadn't heard before, but all of which was great, living up to and surpassing their 7". I definitely hope that another release is in the works. Check these guys out when they play here again.

The headliners, **Spaceneedle**, were the night's biggest disappointment. Their set started off with 10 minutes of nothing but discordant guitar and keyboard noise. Incoherent, ear piercing, and frankly very annoying noise that got louder as the 10 minutes progressed. They did play some good songs after that, but they didn't really redeem themselves in my eyes. I'd say I wouldn't see them again, but they really weren't that bad. I'd give them another chance.

All in all a pleasant night, and one that confirmed **Orange Glass** another fan.



NERDY GIRL

POP

Friday, 6:00pm Birdland
Fastbacks, Nerdy Girl, and Bad Luck
#13

At the all-ages Friday night show-case at Birdland Cabaret, Moncton's **Bad Luck #13** clearly demonstrated the difference between cute-boy MTV punk and the real thing. The lead singer came out wearing a cut-off black

top, bicycle shorts, thigh-high striped tights, and army boots. With his long, thin, scraggly hair (balding on top) and his black lipstick, he was not a pretty sight. The band delivered bad jokes and hard-rocking punk tunes — very little "pop" but lots of "explosion."

Cecil Seaskull's new band, **Nerdy Girl**, is much different than her previous outfit *Bite*. In this new band, her songs are the sole focus and the other players are there simply to fill the songs out. The band played a couple of songs from the **Nerdy Girl 10"** vinyl EP/cassette, which was actually recorded by Cecil before the band came together, but also played new material that sounded equally good, if not better. Cecil's charismatic stage presence and pointed, memorable lyrics made her set one of the highlights of the festival.

Kudos to the headlining **Fastbacks**, who perhaps put on their best show, and played some of their best songs, at the earlier all-ages gig, instead of saving all the best material for the later bar show. Seattle's remarkably tight pop-punk veterans were the only non-Maritime Sub Pop band at the festival this year.

JAMES COVEY

Friday 10 p.m. Birdland
Scratching Post/Thee Suddens/Rebecca West/Space Needle/Fastbacks

The opening band at the Friday bar show of the Pop Explosion was **Scratching Post**, all the way from London, Ontario. Some of their songs, such as "The Park" and "Speedo," got my attention for a while with their ear-catching riffs and interesting lyrics, but most of the performance lacked the energy that usually accompanies their type of hard-metal sound.

Thee Suddens from Moncton were the next band up and they had members of the audience out on the floor and grooving. They had a hard rock sound that completely grabs your attention with subtle speed and key changes.

Birdland regulars **Rebecca West** played well and dragged more of the people out of their seats and



ERIC'S TRIP

REBECCA WEST

EXPLOSION



CUB

but most of the lyrics I could make out were good. They had a few truly excellent melodies, notably in "Bailley's," which I was disappointed to not find on their cassette.

Cub started out with "Flaming Red Bobsled." Live, their chipper, upbeat music ceases to be annoying, and becomes eminently danceable. In fact, I would have danced, but couldn't compete with the four flailing dervishes that dominated the dance floor.

The microphone was a problem for all of the bands, since it was significantly quieter than everything else. Lisa Marr, the lead singer of **Cub**, overcame this like none of the others could, with a voice that projects powerfully.

Cub rocked. They were excellent, and I highly recommend both their live shows and their new split 7" (with the Potatomen) called *the day i said goodbye*.

JOANNE MERRIAM

Saturday, 6 p.m. Birdland
The Motes/Poumons/ Hayden/Eric's Trip

As **The Motes** took the stage, the appreciative all-ages crowd flooded the floor. Their sample-ridden Pavement-like set was well received as they played lightly through their half-hour set. They had some very melodic songs that I found to be rather catchy.

After **The Motes** came Windsor, Ontario's **Poumons**. I liked them. Again, very catchy, upbeat songs with a boppy early 60's sound, only crunchier. They played some great short songs with nice harmonies, and guitar hooks reminiscent of early Who.

Following a short break, **Hayden** delighted the crowd with his hard-edged acoustic songs. Armed only with his guitar, raspy voice, and short, quirky stories, he kept the all-ages crowd happy. That's not easy for an acoustic act at an electric show. I was definitely impressed!

Then came **Eric's Trip**, my highlight of the all-ages show! They plowed through a wicked 50-minute set with lots of great new songs like "Lighthouse" and "Spaceship," and pleased the enthusiastic crowd with some obscurities like "Belong" and "Sloansong." It wasn't the best **Eric's Trip** show I've seen, but it was definitely a good one! When it was over, the crowd yelled for 10 minutes for an encore but to no avail...the sound man had left.

SHANT PELLEY

Saturday, 10pm Birdland
Elliot Smith/Les Pichous/Pansy Division/
The Posies

Unfortunately, the bar shows weren't as full as the all-ages shows, and the crowd was nowhere near as attentive. That didn't work in **Elliot Smith's** favor. I could barely hear his acoustic performance over the noisy bar crowd. At times, I was hoping he'd pull a "Lou Barlow" and storm off, just to make a point, but he didn't. He played on through, and I really enjoyed what I could hear of his folksy performance.

Next came Quebec City's **Les Pichous**. This live piece band was very tight, guitar-driven rock band...nothing original, but nothing terrible either. Thankfully, more people took to the floor and seemed to enjoy them.

The billed act, I wanted to see, **Joyce Raskin** of the amazing band *Scarce*, had to pull out at the last minute, but it was o.k. because San Francisco's **Pansy Division** pretty much made up for it. They were Green Day for the queer set...a very fun live band.

By the end of the show, the bassist was wearing only a t-shirt, and spraying "silly string" on the crowd!

It was hard for the next band, **Pluto**, to hold my attention after **Pansy Division**. Out about halfway through the set I started to get into it. They were sort of like a slower Ramones. People told me I'd like them, and they were right, but it was so hard to come down after **Pansy Division**!

The capper for the evening, and the most awaited act for me aside from Sloan, was Seattle's **The Posies**. These guys are great and they failed to disappoint. I had a hard time hearing Jon Auer's screaming guitar sometimes, but the music and harmonies got me. New songs like "Please Return It" and "Grant Hart" were just as well received as stuff from their "Frosting on the Beater" album. I don't think they played anything from their first two albums though. Oh, well. It was fun and tiring and I didn't get to bed until 4:30 a.m.

SHANT PELLEY

Sunday, 6 p.m. Birdland
Elevator to Hell/Monoxides/Thrush Hermit/Dambuilders

In retrospect, it was a pretty foolish endeavour to try to attend ALL of the shows at this year's pop ex-

plosion, but this one I wouldn't have missed for anything. I had only seen **Elevator to Hell** perform once before, months ago, and was looking forward to seeing them again as I love their records like nothing else in the world.

They did not disappoint me. Rick White (of **Eric's Trip** fame) did most of the vocals, alternately singing with eyes closed and bending over his guitar with such fervour that it became unplugged on several occasions. At one point, he tried to light a fake cigar that he'd obtained at the cinnamon toast brunch earlier in the day. Chris and Mark of **eric's trip** alternated drum duties, and Tara and Ron (who only appeared with the band for the second half of the set) of **Orange Glass** played bass and keyboard, respectively. They did guitar-heavy versions of bouncy, catchy, dirge-like songs like "the who" (from their 7" on sappy) and Ron played guitar while sitting at his keyboard for "why I hate aug 93." Simply, it was one of the best sets I saw over the weekend.

The **Monoxides** were up next. All of my KISS-loving friends really like them. They've got the choreography, the matching outfits (in this case, shirts with the number 6), and the stadium rock banter ("are you ready to rawwwk!"). They did the total 70s macho rock cliché thing, but they did it so well I just had to laugh. Songs like "got an idea" and "chad" (during which they threw a pair of underwear into the audience, which I didn't see ANYONE pick up) were mindless fun that have to be experienced live to be fully appreciated.

Thrush Hermit were at their goofy best, and played exceptionally well. Even better than on Thursday night, if that's possible. No Steve Miller covers...mostly songs from the great pacific ocean ep (opened with the title track and closed with an extended rock-out of "claim to lame") as well as a couple of new ones and the perennial crowd pleaser, "french inhale." The floor was packed. In my opinion, it was one of their best shows ever!

I was unfamiliar with the **Dambuilders** and didn't know quite what to expect. In the end, I was quite impressed by the quality of their musicianship and the cohesiveness of their unique sound. Their songs had a propulsive rhythm to which the kids up front danced quite vigorously. The violin player with the skunk-coloured hair produced sounds I had never heard

before. She was amazing! So agile. They all had great voices. I did recognize one song ("smell") but apparently they did play all of their more well-known pieces ("shine" among them).

KATRINA GRENTZ

Sunday, 10 p.m. Birdland
Wooden Stars/Superfriendz/jale/
Dambuilders

The inclement weather about which the **dambuilders** had joked at the all ages show led a couple of us in search of hot chocolate so I missed the beginning of the **Wooden Stars**. I had seen one of the members perform earlier in the day acoustically under the name **Snailhouse** so I guess I was expecting something a little more mellow. I liked them. They're discordant guitar and bizarre tempo changes were a little unsettling. At the end of the set the guitarist threw down his instrument and jumped in the air for long after the lights had been turned down.

Superfriendz, like most of the locals I saw over the week, were in fine form. Matt Murphy's guitar antics were entertaining as usual (though I think he only jumped off the bass drum once). They played "Come clean" back to back with "when they paid me." A couple of new songs, but mostly stuff from *mock up, scale down*. It was a very tight set ending, of course, with the *superfriendz* theme song (no longer instrumental). How could anyone stand still?

...Unless of course they were very tired which brings me to...

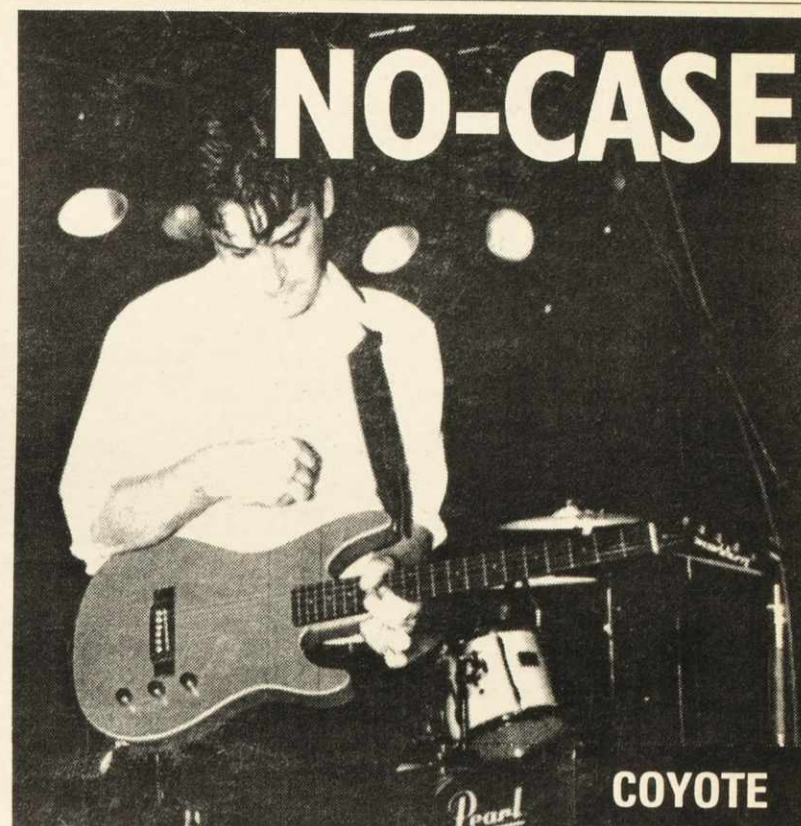
The **jale** show. I was only awake for half of this as the pop explosion began to take its toll on me. What I heard sounded mellower than usual (the new songs are not as upbeat). I was told that they played songs mainly from the *closed ep* (like "double edge") and nothing from *dreamcake*.

The second **Dambuilders** set was supposedly much the same as the first but I have yet to find anyone able to stay until it was over (though they all promised me they would). It was just too much to take in over too short a time and everyone I know was left exhausted...but happy.

KATRINA GRENTZ



THE MONOXIDES



NO-CASE

COYOTE

Friday, 9:30 p.m. Oasis
Mastadon Ridge/Coyote/Cool Blue Halo/State Champs/Mystic
Zealots/Greyhound Tragedy/Rosebuddy

If the **NoCases** had anything going for them it was efficiency. Short sets, and short breaks between bands. **Mastadon Ridge** were the first up (9:30 p.m. on the dot), but they weren't able to grab the attention of the small crowd that was trickling in. It was just three guys making a lot of noise anyway. No big deal.

Coyote played next and were definitely on. They've become a lot tighter and a lot more aggressive over the last year. I think that this gig marked the first time that **Chris** didn't break a string.

Cool Blue Halo played another great set and I was especially impressed with their song "Sweetie Said." It had this sorta sliding back and forth heavy feel, and then Paul and Barry harmonized over this blissful chord. Chilling.

It's pretty easy to shrug off a lot of the bands that played the **Pop Explosion** or **No Cases**, but **State Champs** aren't one of them. The **Pavement** comparison is there and it works for them. It will be interesting to see how this band evolves.

Mystic Zealots were ok. Big loud, crunchy and very in-your-face (without being repetitive.) The bassist had very cool red hair, too.

Greyhound Tragedy didn't impress me (surprised?...well, they had some fans in the dwindling audience, but power pop with constant vocal harmonies makes me cringe. Worst of all, they played way too long.

Rosebuddy emptied the **Oasis**. I think that they thought that they were punk or something. Unfortunately, this Montreal-based band was far too restrained and threw in way too many pop hooks. Punk wasn't meant to be tame. But then again, I don't even know what punk is anymore. With **Rosebuddy**, I left not caring.

MIKE GRAHAM

Saturday, 9:30 pm Oasis
Madhat/Scrap Douglas/Len"/Essen"/Grace Babies/Hip Club
Groove

"Mercifully, the sound guy shut them down," said one otherwise satisfied customer at the Saturday night **No Case** concert, after an impromptu reunion of the band, **Essen** — whose act greatly resembled an attempt to dismantle the set — followed Toronto's **Len**, who put on a tight show, even better than their Friday performance at ROW.

After the many **Len** fans left, the **Grace Babies** were left with a fairly small crowd to entertain, but they managed a good show nevertheless. Their performance was quite pop oriented; their die-hard fans may have been happy, but they've done better.

Hip Club Groove put on an impressive set, with a wicked mixture of both improvised and rehearsed songs. Lead singer Cory Bowles (aka Cheklove Shakil) stole the show with his on-the-spot rap about the Big Goats and sexy chickens — hey, don't blame them, it was the audience's choice!

The entire crowd (even the two dancing girls) seemed to like Lunenburg natives **Madhat**, who performed earlier. Three members of the usual quartet overcame major technical difficulties and a missing guitar player to deliver an awesome version of "The Ride" from their new CD.

The **Pop Explosion** crowd missed a good show at the **Oasis**, and a good deal, too. The cover was thoughtfully lowered as the evening wore on, from \$4 to \$1, depending on when you arrived. A bargain at any price, this pop explosion spin-off was worth every penny.

DANIELLE BOUDREAU & AARON DHIR