

ARTS / CULTURE



Sweet tunes

Burt Neilson Band lulls Grawood into a dream-like serenity

BY CHRIS LEPAN

Friday Night proved to be an exhilarating experience as the Burt Neilson band shook the foundations of the Grawood. Though the bar wasn't packed to full capacity, it was obvious those who payed the eight-dollar cover were more than content.

At the beginning of the first set the dance floor was scattered with only a few ambitious fans, but after only a couple of songs it became evident that dancing is an inevitable response to the music of the Thunder Bay, Ontario-based band.

After that, the floor filled quickly with folks gettin' their groove on, hanging off every note. To be sure, this enthusiasm cannot be attributed to an increasing level of drunkenness — instead of dancing it up with the object of their lust, the bulk of the audience (myself included) was dancing with the band. Eyes were either focussed on stage or closed, as visual contact wasn't needed to maintain the connection between performer and musician.

The band's energy was dominant, particularly in the case of guitarist Dan Dennome. His soulful translation of each screaming guitar note into an equally extreme facial expression assured me the band was having just as much fun on stage as the crowd was on the floor.

Made up of six members, including Mike Filipowitsch (lead guitar), Dennome (rhythm guitar), Jeremy Little (Bass), Jeff Heisholt (organ and keyboards), Gavin McGuire and Jeff Kornblum (percussion), the Burt Neilson Band combines a variety of sounds and styles reminiscent of such great classic rock acts as the Allmans — whose influence can be traced to the band's taste for extended jams.

Climactic guitar solos were strong as Dennome complimented Filipowitsch's supreme lead with catchy fill-ins. Hendrix's "Crosstown Traffic" was treated

justly, as was Steve Miller's "Jet Airliner", which was covered in especially high-spirited fashion.

Heisholt and Filipowitsch rotated on lead vocals and provided balanced harmonies when they sang together. Credit must also be given to Heisholt's keyboard and organ playing, which at times led the band into a dream-like serenity. It was at these moments that the band most effectively captured the mood of the music.

The Burt Neilson Band bears a striking similarity to the band Phish, whose music, coincidentally and simultaneously, was showcased at the Blues Corner last Friday night.

When asked about the band's Phish roots, Mike Filipowitsch was quick to name them his favourite band, but was also quick to point out a Brit-Pop influence on a couple of band members. He concluded that the scope of his band extends well beyond that of a mere Phish spin-off.

"We can't escape our roots, we're just trying to be as different as we can," he said.

The band had no problem putting off their studies at Lakehead University this year in favour of a cross-Canada tour. The main thing for the band right now is honing their own style by playing together every night. As Filipowitsch explains, "what's the point if you can't play live?"

photo by Pascal Langlois

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