

arts & entertainment

Blood, sweat and Spirit hit the east

by Judy Reid

Last Friday night's concert in the McInnes Room was hot, sweaty and intense — kind of like a giant aerobics class except the class keeps screaming for more. More than a thousand tickets were sold in advance and if you were among the unfortunate who missed the show, then you lost out on a great opportunity to meet a new, up and coming maritime band, and to find out why the rest of Canada can't stand still when Spirit of the West comes calling.

Sunfish got things rolling at 9:45 p.m. Tommy Figeon on vocals and guitar, Scott Brown on bass and drummer Mike Morrison played about ten loud, rockin' tunes that surprised more than a few people.

"Who are these guys? They're good." and "I can't believe there's only three of them," could be heard throughout the audience.

The trio hailing from Sydney only formed a year and a half ago, yet have a tight sound you'd expect to hear from a more established band. They've put out a self-titled independent cassette and their new release called *Mola mola* is half mixed and will be released on both CD and cassette.

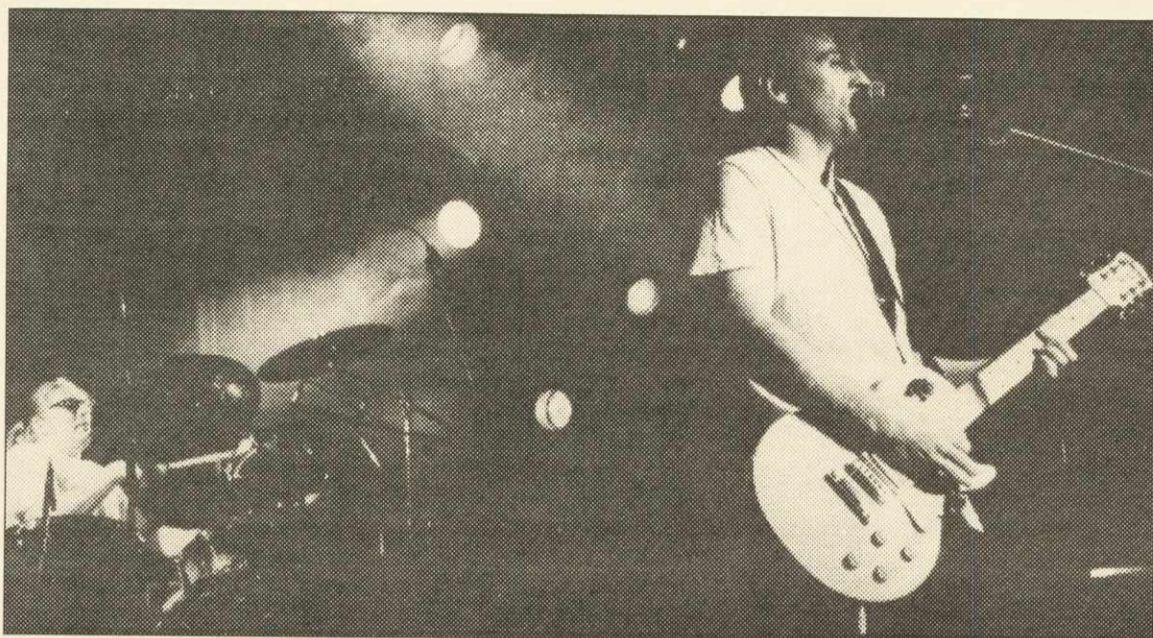
When asked what they'd like to say to their new listeners Figeon replied with good eastern attitude "Party on."

"Buy our albums please," said Brown half-jokingly. "We have to eat."

"Support original music," added Morrison.

Sunfish said they liked opening for other bands because it gave them the chance to meet good acts such as Colin James, Gowan and Real World. Their next gig is at Club Capri in Sydney on October 1, and will be appearing on ASN's Up and Coming later this year. Sunfish did mention they'd really like to play at the Grawood some night and if it happens, be sure to be there and request my personal favourite "Another Day in the Life".

The break between Sunfish and Spirit of the West became more tense as each minute passed. The crowd



Vince Ditrich and John Mann bring some spirit to the east

PHOTOS: PETER BOGACZEWICZ

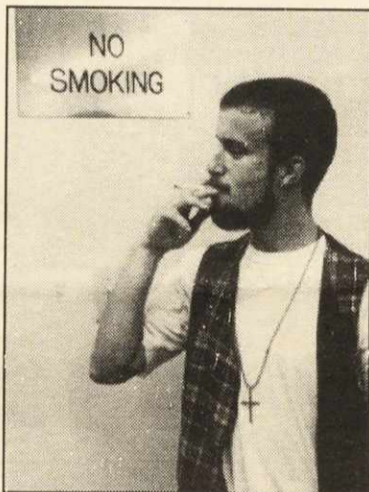
was revved and "Spirit of the West!" chants broke out every ten minutes or so. When a tech fixed the mike, the crowd cheered. A roadie brought out a guitar and the crowd cheered. Smoke filled the stage and the crowd cheered. But when John, Geoffrey, Linda, Hugh and Vince finally sauntered onto the stage with arms raised in peace salutes, the audience roared.

The band broke into "D for Democracy" and kept the audience jumping and jiggling for the next eighty minutes. Crowd favourites such as "Save This House" and "Home For a Rest" literally shook the floor and the ceiling as well, according to security staff who worked one floor beneath the McInnes Room.

Spirit of the West began as a Celtic-folk trio in 1983 and has since expanded to a five member group that has a harder and more electric sound. To describe who played what would be a little complicated as all members played at least two instruments with bassist Hugh McMillan playing six. But generally speaking John Mann and Geoff Kelly are the principle song writers with Mann on guitar and Kelly on flute. Linda McRae played the accordion and Vince Ditrich was on drums, although he would have made a suc-

cessful second career as a chorus line dancer judging by his high kicking antics on stage.

If the two thousand stomping feet can be used as a popularity gauge, SOTW have gained more than a few fans in just the past year. However there was a least one person who



Sunfish's Tommy Figeon sticks it to the MAN

knew the words to all their songs.

"I've been a fan for many years. This has been the eighth time I've seen them," said Dalhousie grad student Debbie Robinson. "I like their politics, philosophy, their attitude."

Speaking of big fans, at one point Mann interrupted the show to have

a chat with some of the larger ones.

"I want you to know that you have been given the gift of bigness and with that gift comes a responsibility to protect your neighbours." Amid cheers of agreement, Mann warned the crowd against getting out of hand, and to ensure the guilty parties got the message he added, "If I see you again we're going to stop the show and throw you out of the fucking door."

After the show, a quieter and more relaxed Mann explained why he came on so strong at the concert.

"The bottom line is we just don't want to see anyone get hurt."

Mann cited two concerts where one person fractured his skull and split open his nose while stage diving, and another spent a week in traction after a diver landed on her neck.

"It's very stressful and distressing when you're up on stage and you watch some guy come down on somebody's neck, and watch them fall to the ground. It's a horrible feeling and I honestly would rather not do it if that's what people are into."

With their album, *Go Figure*, Spirit of the West introduced their more electric sound and continued the trend with their latest release *Faithlift*. Some fans have complained

that they don't like the new sound and describe it as mainstream.

"When our second album came out people said they like the first album. When the third came out they said they liked the second album," said Mann.

"Since our earlier material, we've changed quite drastically," he admitted. "We're not a blatantly Celtic as we used to be. But we've been doing this ten years now. I think if we had just put out the same album six times, people would have been equally frustrated."

SOTW will be back in the recording studio January and February, but have yet to decide what shape the album will take.

"I have no idea what the next album is going to sound like. I really don't," said Mann. "Geoff and I write the songs. We sit around with the acoustic guitars and the song has the potential to be anything. It could be very heavy; it could be light."

The band will be embarking on a new and unique project in May when they will be recording an album with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra.

"It's exciting because right now we're just in the process of talking to managers, composers and conductors. It's completely a new musical education for us," explained Mann. "We want that album to just stand on its own."

Once the audience was sure cries of "encore" would do no good and they filed out of the MacInnes Room. I noticed that these people could indeed be mistaken for a very large gang of aerobic fanatics. With sweat spilling down their faces, clothing sticking to their backs and shirts that were stripped off an hour earlier being wrestled back on, it's safe to say the audience saw a hot show.

"It was certainly the warmest," said Mann when asked how the Halifax show compared with others. "We were completely soaking wet when we came off stage."

"It's fun," he added. "I mean, we're tired but when we get out there and the crowd is that enthusiastic, you have to rise to their level."

Funny, and here we were trying to keep up with them.

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