

An editorial in/on the abstract

It would seem that I am the new arts editor. Being in this position, I suppose that I should have some sort of vision of what I want to see in this section. Well, one thing I find consistently missing are *views*. There are plenty of *reviews*, but no non-specific thoughts on the arts in general. There must be philosophy majors out there who have views. I am not one of them, but I have a little story...

I went to a gallery installation once. Having nothing else to do, I just stood in a room which contained a white chair, a red dress hanging in the corner, and a rickety old projector which was showing a ten second film loop of a woman talking. There was no sound in the room except for the film flapping as it went through the projector.

After I stopped trying to figure out what this collection of items meant I had the deep aesthetic response which can be summarized in a word: "neat".

That would have been my review; "I thought it was neat." Is there any point in trying to deconstruct a response to something so abstract? What did the chair symbolize? Why was the dress red? Was the projector making noise on purpose or was it just a piece of crap?

Intent. Only the artist knows these answers. Reviews of the abstract are either speculation or philosophical masturbation. The difference being that the latter contains longer words.

Another question arises: Is this art? Then another: What is art? Webster says, "products of creative work." Well, it is hard to refute that, and the reason is that it is so vague that it renders itself as a useless definition. It just sounds nice and seems reasonable. The problem is that if you look at it long enough you begin to question what is meant by "products". What is, or more importantly, what is not "creative work"?

Art cannot be defined and there is no "correct" aesthetic response to it (sorry Shopenauer). You may not understand a certain piece of art. The reason may be that it was meaningless to begin with (the film *Suture* comes to mind). The same artwork may be praised, scorned, or laughed at by others. Who is correct? Everyone. It's all subjective folks.

Well enough babbling for now. Hopefully some smarty-pants philosophy grad student will write something about nothing for next week. (That's a hint — a plea for abstract submissions.)

Mike Graham

ginger: A closer look

by Lilli Ju with Scott Fleck

On November 11, Vancouver's ginger played to a paltry crowd at the Roxbury. Such a shame really. 'Cuz they were really good, and they're also a great bunch of guys.

Why the dismal turnout? Maybe it was because the Rheostatics were playing at the same time at the Grawood (personally, I think ginger is much better than the Rheostatics). Maybe because ginger's only been around for about 2 years. Maybe because people don't know that they used to be the Grapes of Wrath. Maybe because the Roxbury just sucks as a venue for that kind of music.

Well, whatever the reason, the end-result was this: ginger performed solidly, but try as they might, they really could not get the "crowd" going. Aside from a few dozen people lining the front of the stage, everyone else stood far back off the dance floor, just bobbing their heads and tapping their beer bottles to the music.

When the Grapes of Wrath broke up in October '92, three of its members, Tom Hooper (lead singer/guitarist), Chris Hooper (drums) and Vincent Jones (keyboards), got together to form ginger in November '92. Aside from the small fact that Tom Hooper has taken over lead vocals, ginger has pretty well retained much of its Grapes of Wrath sound.

They have since released a self-titled, 6-song EP produced by John Leckie (Stone Roses, Ride, Pink Floyd, XTC) in October '93 and toured with Sarah McLachlan. Last month, they released their first full length album *Far Out* produced by Jim Rondinelli (Matthew Sweet, The Odds, Sloan), and started touring across Canada soon after its release. Guitarists Sean Ashby and Lanny Hussey joined the band to record the album, and are also along for the cross-Canada tour.

On Friday, they played pretty well all their songs off their EP and album, as well as a few songs from their Grapes of Wrath days. Their sound was good and tight — a lot like their "studio" sound. Although Tom Hooper had a cold that day, he sounded great. Very relaxed on stage, he entertained the audience with quirky anecdotes and funny lines, in an attempt to get people going.

ginger has a great stage presence which makes for a great live show. Upbeat songs like "Solid Ground" and "Feel Like Falling Down" were among my favourites. The song "Far Out" with its more reflective and mellow tones was also nice.

To describe their music to those who don't know ginger or the Grapes of Wrath is a challenging exercise. Well... they have a great acoustic guitar sound — although they aren't an exclusively acoustic guitar band. Their sound is very relaxed, chilled out — upbeat at one moment, raw-sounding the next. One friend described their sound as being very "western Canadian." They have some of that "alternative" influence, but would definitely not be classified as such. There is a very melodic quality to their music, produced cooperatively by all the members of the band.

Earlier in the evening, I got to meet Tom and Chris Hooper (yes, they are brothers). When I arrived at the Roxbury, the band were playing the video poker machines while their technical crew was doing a sound check.

I sat around and watched them play for awhile until Tom lost to the game. Then we (Tom, Chris and I) headed to the dressing rooms of the Roxbury to chat.

Gaz: So, first of all, where did you guys come up with the name "ginger"?

Chris: Yeah, it's a family pet for years. If you look on the album cover (*Far Out*), you can see lots of Gingers. I don't know where they got all those clay dogs.

Tom: I had this book on natural herbs and wild food that was one of the spices. And it sounds kinda like a teenager name from the 50s. Thought it would be kinda wild to be called "ginger" — sounded kinda' groovy.

Gaz: What about your name being spelt in all lower case letters?

Chris: Just to be different. Crazy. Like k.d. lang.

Gaz: Tell me a little about the band.

Chris: Well, we've been together for two years now. Wow. It doesn't seem like that long. The band seems to be a lot more together than the Grapes were at the end. It's a lot more rock'n'roll. A lot less mellow stuff.

Tom: There's more of a "caring" attitude involved. Not that we didn't care about each other with the Grapes. But it just got to the point where we saying, "let's just get it [a concert] over with." It was kind of a drag situation.

Gaz: So you guys have an EP and an album, and you've toured with Sarah McLachlan and you're touring again. What else have you done?

Chris: We've got a CD-ROM, that's got videos, a bonus track, lyrics, biographies on us. It's also the CD. And it's only a couple of bucks more expensive than the CD.

Tom: So buy the CD-ROM!

Gaz: What do you like about Halifax?

Tom: It's got a great history. I guess it's one of the oldest cities in North America. Oldest graveyard in North America. Most bars per capita.

Chris: Everything's great about it.

Tom: It's just a maritime kind of city. Pretty cool. Kinda' has that "west coast-ness" about it.

Chris: Yeah, it's the ocean-thing which is cool.

Gaz: What do you like about playing live?

Tom: We don't make music just to play it live. But at the same time, we like to perform.

Chris: It's the biggest thrill, playing in front of people. It's amazing. You have a great show and it's just awesome.

Tom: Whether it's rock shows or puppet shows. We did a puppet show over the summer, but nobody knows about that.

Chris: Hey, do you call the west coast the "maritimes"?

Tom: I guess you're supposed to because of the oceans. What do you guys call the west coast?

Gaz: The west coast.

Chris: I'll have to think about that later.

Gaz: How has your sound changed or stayed the same since you were the Grapes of Wrath?

Tom: I kind of see it like going from one Grapes album to the next. We never really think about direction. It just evolves naturally. It's pretty obvious that we would sound like the Grapes since we're three-quarters the Grapes.

Chris: It's the same song writing. Even when we were the Grapes, we didn't really think about "our sound." But I guess we did want to make something different with *Far Out*. That's why we got Jim [Rondinelli, producer]. We really liked what he did with Matthew Sweet. It was so raw, plain. It has great melodies and it's just right there... He said, "you guys are great musicians, so let's just do it." And we did. We recorded the album in three weeks. And for us that's incredible. A lot of stuff is first takes, second takes. That's what we never did with the Grapes of Wrath. We used to spend a whole day on one little thing. But Jim will say, "it's not perfect, but so what." That to me is the biggest difference than with the Grapes. We were really perfectionists.

Gaz: What happened with the Grapes of Wrath?

Chris: We broke up on Halloween, 1992. Our last gig. We had been breaking up for about year, but in this business, you're usually booked a half a year in advance. It was bitter and it still is.

Gaz: The songs *The Earth Revolves Around You*, *Mr. Attitude* and *Just Like You* are about that, aren't they?

Tom: Mr. Attitude isn't. In hindsight, it sounds like it should be. Oddly enough, it wasn't originally.

Chris: It's about another dick. I mean a person named Dick... Richard.

Gaz: Do you guys mind being promoted as "formerly the Grapes of Wrath"?

Tom: It's OK. 'Cuz we are. Just like with Stephen King. If he writes another novel, he'll be promoted as the guy who also wrote "this" other thing.

Chris: But it's good too. Because Grapes of Wrath fans would probably like us, too.

Tom: It's kinda funny. You see these posters that say "GRAPES OF WRATH" than underneath it: "now as ginger" in smaller print.

Chris: The Grapes of Wrath were around for a big part of our lives. And will be for awhile.

Gaz: How would you describe your music?

Chris: I don't know. That's pretty hard. It goes from mellow to pretty noisy stuff.

Tom: Melodic pop music. Melodic rock. Lots of guitar.

Chris: I call it "mid-90s rock."

Gaz: So what's next?

Tom: There's this big bronze statue being placed, with a big ribbon cutting ceremony.

Chris: A big bronze statue of the Grapes, hugging each other. That says "Grapes of Wrath forever."

Tom: With a tear rolling down our cheeks.

Chris: Seriously after tomorrow night, we'll be heading home, playing some cities along the way.

Tom: Maybe another album in a year or so. I have a child on the way in January. I'm watching all these baby shows. So buy the record so I can feed my child!

Chris: I'm going to be the crazy uncle, the 30-year old drummer. I

Furnaceface

The band behind the name

by Jen Horsey

It was with trepidation that I waited for Tom Stewart, bassist and vocalist for the Ottawa-based Furnaceface to call me so that I could interview him earlier this week. However, when I answered the phone and heard him crunching on some food while he took his lunch break at the used instrument store where he works, I was relieved to discover that he's a real person, just like everyone else. Well, almost like everyone else.

To start off, I wanted to describe the music of Furnaceface, but I was having considerable difficulty finding the appropriate adjectives. In an effort to make things a little clearer for you, I asked Tom if he could describe his band's music for me. He paused for a moment, then completely avoided answering my question by saying "I think a lot of bands really hurt themselves by describing their sound... We've never done that."

Great. I suppose the onus is once again on me.

OK, suffice it to say, then, that the music is difficult to classify. Even from song to song on a Furnaceface album, genre classification is elusive. Elements of country and rap, and sometimes a heavier near metal clash enter into the music... vaguely, sort of, kind of. What does hold it all together though, is a combination of thought-provoking lyrics and a wicked sense of humour.

I've seen them several times before when they've visited Halifax. Their live show, like their music defies simple description. It's far from the typical: band gets up on stage, band screams into mic and thrashes around a bit.

There's plenty of that but, as Tom said, "we try to do what we'd like to see a band do." And apparently they have quite a show planned for us this weekend. They're working with film aides to create a kind of 'Multimedia' effect (my clichéd phraseology, not theirs). If you caught them when they visited here for the COCA (Canadian Organization of Campus Activities) conference earlier this year, it's a refined version of what they were doing then.

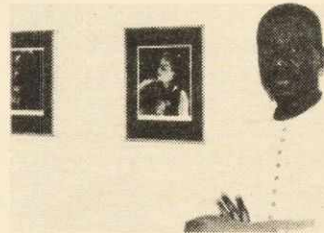
This Will Make You Happy is their first release since Furnaceface signed to Cargo Records. After the success of *Just Buy It* they found themselves being aggressively courted by major labels. But Furnaceface took the indie route, and signed with Cargo, who was their distributor for *Just Buy It*.

When questioned about this move, Tom described a scenario which is familiar to many moderately successful indie bands. "We'd have our practice," he said, "and for the first two hours we'd pull out our briefcases." Now they can leave the briefcase type of administration to Cargo, while they get down to the business of making music.

In addition to Tom, the members of Furnaceface are Pat Banister, Dave Dudley and Marty Jones. They'll be driving down from Ottawa to the Grawood this weekend for their only two Eastern gigs for this trip (Yes, that's right folks. They love us so much that they're driving all this way just to play the Grawood.) They will be playing Friday and Saturday nights. Cover is \$7. If that seems a little steep for now, (though I suspect that it will be well worth it) they will be returning here in the not too distant future as part of their proper tour of the Maritimes.

James Beddington

Gaz: Where are you from?
CS: I am from Barbados but I have been at NSCAD since 1990 with time off for travelling.
Gaz: What is your favouring medium?
CS: Acrylics and ceramics, but I get my hand into everything.
Gaz: What are your goals?
CS: Artistically, I'm striving for proficiency. To maximize the comprehension and tell stories as clearly as I can.
Gaz: Is there a common theme in your work?
CS: People are always involved. Whether as subject or recipient. I



want to educate with my work because people are always uninformed.
Gaz: Is there a predominant source of inspiration for you?
CS: There is no one person or thing.
Gaz: Do you have any idols or movements that interest you?
CS: I like Russian Constructionism, because it was filled with very ac-

cessible images.
Gaz: What was your most satisfying artistic experience?
CS: The series of photos in the show. I was consciously in control of everything.
Gaz: What have I forgot to ask?
CS: In Barbados we have a saying "every skin teeth is not a laugh" It means that you can be funny and serious at the same time. It applies to my work that is often seen as funny.

Cedric is one of many of the exhibiting artists in the Mosaic show this week at the Anna Leonowens Galleries 2 and 3.

I remember seeing Allison Outhit playing at the Cinnamon Toast barbeque in August and thinking to myself, "Oh no! She's going solo-acoustic!" Well, since that time she has put together a cool band called Rebecca West. I've only seen them at the Pop Explosion and they smoked. I think that they will be recording soon and they are playing this weekend at the Desis. So check 'em out.

Local band alert

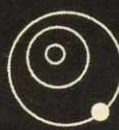


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