

Jan. 29 - Feb. 4



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It's a Super Sub! Blues and Beer

by Michael Brennan

There was lots of blues at the **Supersub** last weekend, and all of it pretty good. The **F-Tones** were snappy and competent, and **Downchild** professional if uninspired. **Dutch Mason** put on a jumpy, energetic show, playing wonderfully off the audience: he was cheered on to three encores and even ended up dancing on stage with

members of the audience. But for me, the fundamental passion and honesty of original American blues evaded all of the groups except for **Joe Murphy** and his **Water St. Blues Band**.

I had only seen the Water St. Blues Band twice before, and each time I was immediately impressed by their great blues sensibility and strong energy. Each time they sounded quite

fresh and rewarding, which isn't usual for blues, especially for a blues copy band if that's what one wishes to call Water St. But more importantly, they sounded like a real 'ghetto blues' band, like a band that plays the dives of backyard Chicago or Mississippi. It is Joe Murphy who conveys such a sober sensitivity, in his harp and guitar playing and particularly in his singing.

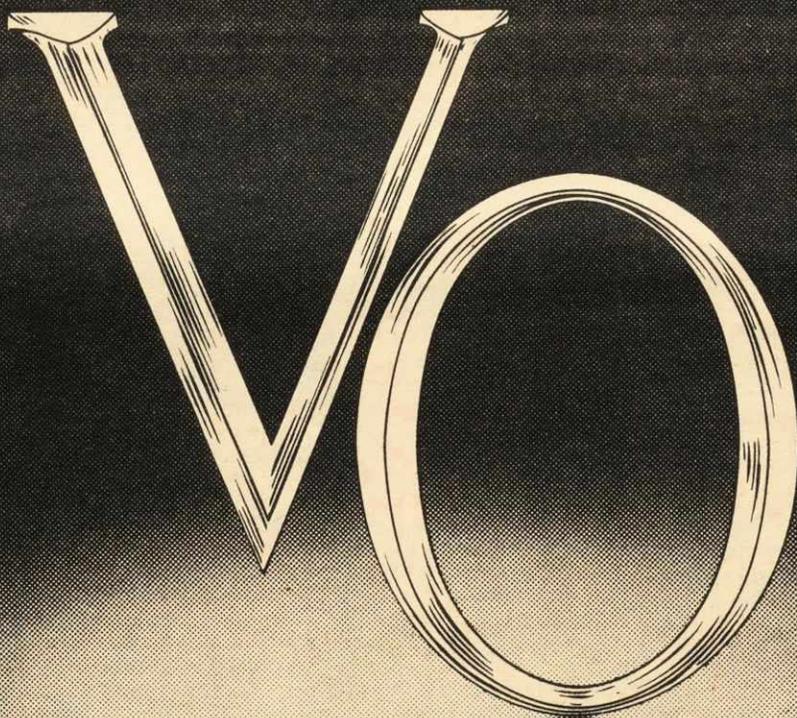
Singing the words of the great blues numbers as he does, one would think he lived and wrote them, which is a rare quality in a white blues interpreter. His voice is rugged and truly moving.

Water St.'s performance at the SUB Saturday night was by far the most exciting I had yet seen of them. Joe Murphy's guitarist, who looks like he does come out of backyard Chicago, is a striking player and his solos that night were always sharp. His playing is quiet and subtle, and standing in the back of the band, I'm sure the only thing he cared about was his guitar. He leaned intensively into his playing, struggling continually. It's wonderful to see a good guitarist work the way he did. Even Murphy's simple but solid guitar lines were tight and piercing. He leans with the blues, never exploiting them or mercilessly running them off, and his band leans with him.

As an added delight, Water St. ended up playing more than just the blues. Halfway through the second set, Terry Edmunds, guitarist for Dutch Mason, jumped on stage and launched furiously into the first unmistakable notes of "Johnny B. Goode". Spontaneous and wild, the band blasted out rock and roll the way it's supposed to be played. Then, again without notice, Edmunds moved onto "Roll Over Beethoven", screaming to the band "in C!" It was like a Jerry Lee Lewis concert from 1957, with the audience practically on top of the band and stunned by the furious intensity. It was hard to play after Edmunds left, but Murphy continued with two great soul numbers: Otis Redding's "Sitting on the Dock of the Bay" and Wilson Pickett's "634-5789."

I certainly doubt Joe Murphy will make much of a living from his music, which is quite unfortunate. The important thing is that he keeps playing good, honest music, music far more rewarding than that played by most established blues or blues-based rock bands in Canada today. Halifax needs the Water St. Blues Band. Playing small clubs or rooms where the communication between audience and musicians is intimate and completely unpretentious always makes for a creative atmosphere that is the seed of good popular music, whether it be blues, rock and roll or country and western. Joe Murphy's spirit has to create something positive.

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