

Skeleton Crew's muscular music wondrous

by Kenneth Newman

Something new and different is coming to Dal on the 25th of March. Skeleton Crew will be flying up from New York City for just one concert in Canada. The thing that makes Skeleton Crew different, aside from the fact that it features the best electric guitarist since Hendrix, is that it's a rock band with only two members.

Some bands, like Soft Cell, have only two members but they cover up for the fact by using tapes and machines. Skeleton Crew does it all at once. Fred Frith and Tom Cora, the members of the Crew, trade off on guitar, bass, "devices," violin and even cello while pounding

away at intricate rhythms with foot pedals and whatever spare hands they might have. As the *New York Times* put it, "part of the fun is seeing how Fred Frith and Tom Cora get through their own songs."

Skeleton Crew like to keep themselves busy on stage, switching from one instrument to another and from one kind of music to another. In a performance at the Zurich Jazz Festival in Switzerland last October the band went from a punkish tune to a traditional Turkish dance tune (played with a violin and a synthesizer) to a heavy rock tune to an Ecuadorian folk tune to an African High-Life piece through which Frith's guitar alter-

nately danced and soared. These superb musicians prefer the challenge such an approach presents rather than to sit back complacently and play little parts in a rock band. Or, as the band puts it: What better way to capture the sense of risk and surprise . . . than to risk the collapse of the rhythm section at any minute? So far their "rhythm section" has never collapsed but the Crew have managed, in the words of the *Washington Post*, to present their audiences with "one marvelous, uproarious surprise after another."

Their music is very hard to describe because it's so varied. At times they sound like King Crim-

son, but twice as intricate and twice as good. They've taken classical composer John Cage's theories on the possibilities of music and expanded on them. In some ways they've revived Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht's theatrical leiders, and in other ways they've translated dadaist theories of art into sound and motion. Yet at the same time they can out-rock, out-jazz and out-punk (Frith was Johnny Rotten's first choice to produce *Bollocks* and remains PIL's biggest influence) any band going. I like to think of their music as folk music for the 21st century, thoughtful music that you can dance to. But none of this really means anything until you have heard the band. And they really must be heard to be believed. As *Québec, Le Soleil* put it, Skeleton Crew is, "Une expérience intégrale!"

Frith is nothing less than a phenomenon — the best and most important guitarist of the Seventies and, so far, the Eighties as well. A recent article in the jazz magazine, *Down Beat* (Jan., 1983) came up with a string of adjectives to describe him — prolific, eclectic, enigmatic, innovative, eccentric, controversial — the list could go on and on. Record collectors know of him from albums he's played on with Henry Cow, the Art Bears, Massacre, Material, Brian Eno, the Residents, Jade Warrior, Lol Coxhill, Henry Kaiser — this list goes on and on as well. Even those who have never heard of him have heard Frith by way of his influence on literally thousands of guitarists, from Robert Ripp and Phil Manzanera to Eddie Van Halen, including all points between and beyond. I've seen Frith play in a number of cities and the residual effect of his performances are always the same, no guitarist who has heard him ever plays the same again.

Tom Cora, though less known than Frith, is no less a fantastic musician. Mostly known as a jazz musician (he's toured Europe playing with the likes of Karl Berger, Oliver Lake, and Leroy Jenkins), Cora started out his musical career as a rock guitarist before "giving it all up" to become a masterful cellist. As a cellist he's studied with Ismet Siral, a virtuoso musician from Turkey and with Luis Garcia-Renart, a protégé of Pablo Casals. In New York City, he's a familiar site at The Mudd Club, CBGB's, and Hurrah's playing with the rock band Curlew. With Skeleton Crew he plays cello, drums, and "devices," but he's at his most brilliant on electric bass and equally adept at a number of different styles.

A Halifax band, PBX, will be opening for Skeleton Crew. PBX's set up looks like a fairly traditional jazz band but their playing is more like a spirited fusion of jazz and rock. Usually their music consists of a heavy bass line coupled with powerful drumming on which staccato guitar lines and a wailing saxophone are superimposed. Their music, while original, betrays obvious influences of European bands such as Henry Cow, Faust and Company. Personally, I find them at their best when they're making serene "ambient music" ala Brian Eno.

The concert, which is being sponsored by the Dalhousie Association of Graduate Students (three cheers for their courage to put on a band that isn't a blatant rip-off of washed-up old sixties music!) begins at 9:00 pm on Friday, March 25. It's being held in the McInnes Room of the SUB. Tickets are on sale at various record stores around town and at the SUB (and they're cheap, too).



Deborah Feingold

Yet another back-breaking trivia quiz....

TRIVIA QUIZ

Last week's answers

1. **Tightrope** starred Mike Connors as Nick Stone.
2. Robert Loggia played **Elfego Baca** (watch that spelling Cincinnati!)
3. **T.H.E. Cat**. The T.H.E. stood for Thomas Hewitt Edward.
4. Tom Tryon started as **Texas John Slaughter**, in **The Cardinal**, and has written **The Other, Harvest Home**, and **Crowned Heads**.
5. The Krell of Altair IV left their mark in **Forbidden Planet** loosely

based upon **The Tempest** by Shakespeare.

6. Ross and Demelza Poldark live at Nampara.
7. Patty Duke had the dual role. Charles Nelson Reilly was the coach.
8. Eleanor Rigby
9. Donovan
10. **The Dambusters** starring Richard Todd.

This week's quiz

1. A madwoman imprisons a young woman planning to prepare her as a bride for her dead son.

Name the madwoman, the actress who played her and the actress who played the lady in distress. Who played the feeble-minded servant?

2. What actor was married to the daughter of the creator of the character he played? Name the character, the author, and the daughter.
3. What is the crucial ingredient that Sinbad needs to procure in order to restore the princess to her natural state? Name the film, the actors who played Sinbad and the princess, and the featured cinematic technique.

4. Piggy, Simon, and the conch are main ingredients of what book/movie? Name the author and the director.

5. A man is stripped and then pursued by a band of natives. Name the film and its star.
6. The villain refuses to return to civilization and is done in by a pack of baboons. Name the film and its star.
7. Who was L'Angelo Mysterioso? (possible 6 point answer)
8. Who sang about Rosa's Cantina? Where was it? Who danced there?

9. Name the male and female lead vocalists of The Bells? What was their original name? Who left the group when it was changed and what was her relation to the remaining members?

10. In "Killing me softly" who is supposedly being killed according to the songwriter and who is doing the killing (I want names)?

Current Leaders:

- The Cincinnati Kid — 43 pts.
Stephen Allen — 41 pts.
John Keigan — 37.5 pts.

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