

WE TASTE GOOD LIKE A MUSIC ZINE SHOULD
winter 1995

goodCITIZEN

a zine about music and life in vermont

free and proud of it

step inside
SLUSH

the nectar romis story

harold luce
and

hartt hollow

montpelier's

pyralisk

anne weiss

james kochalka

the name of
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cover photo of famous potato by eric hutchins

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“I Want A Shot of the Magic Kingdom”

David Kamm shouts! “I Want a Shot of the Magic Kingdom!” There’s enough tension in the air to raise the hair on the back of every cat in town. And David Kamm is quite a cat himself. He’s the cat who yells the loudest in Burlington’s urban folk nightmare Famous Potato. And he’s yelling up a whole mess of quirky tales about love and hate and anger and desperation and characters you might not mind running into in the middle of the night and then some that you just might. Famous Potato is folk because they tell very rural sounding stories about the land and the people who inhabit it. Famous Potato is urban because they scream and shout and make you nervous and then they let you relax for a second and then they scream and shout and make you nervous all over again. And they’re a nightmare because they want to be a nightmare. Nightmares are always interesting. And they always make you nervous.

We chose Famous Potato as the cover story for the very first issue of Good Citizen because they represent what we’re hoping to be all about. They create original music in Vermont. They’re relatively unknown to most Vermonters. They manufacture and market their own music. Bands like Famous Potato work very hard and they receive embarrassingly little support. We’d like to help change that. We’d like to encourage people to turn off the mass-produced, mass-marketed and same-as-it-ever-was music they’re listening to and turn on to local sounds. There’s some amazing music being made in Vermont...your sup-

port will help it become history. What can you do? Call the radio station you regularly listen to and tell them that you would appreciate some locally produced music being mixed in with their regular programming. Go out and see a local band. Tonight. Tomorrow night. Whenever you can. Trust me: it’s important. And buy local music. CD’s, tapes, singles. Please.

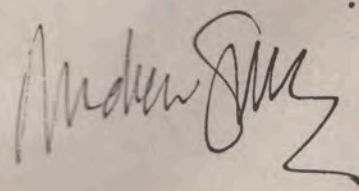
Speaking of history, here’s mine: My British expatriate parents landed me in Monkton, Vermont a painfully long time ago. I graduated from Mount Abraham Union High School and attended Johnson State College. While at college I was music director and general manager of WJSC and started my real obsession with music and the whole idea of turning people onto new tunes. And my obsession with locally produced music started with a band from Johnson called Pinhead. They released two albums on their own B-Sharp Records in the early eighties. The whole DIY (Do it Yourself) work ethic rocked my world. Anyone can do it. I owe my current occupation to that band and that realization. And I owe the name of this magazine to one of their songs “Be a Good Citizen.” And I find it pretty cool that I’m now friends with Mia Sladyk, the current general manager of WJSC, who was in elementary school in Johnson when I was at the college. Round and round and round and round.

I should also add that I am in a band. A band that, coincidentally enough, started in Johnson. My band is called Chin Ho! and we’re an alternative, original music group with three recordings available. We own Monastery Records and put out our own music. We’ve been doing that for four years. We’ve played in Johnson and Lyndonville and St. Albans and South Royalton and Bennington and Middlebury and Montpelier. Just last summer we got to stand on the stages at Ben and Jerry’s One World One Heart Festival and the Big Music Fest in Hardwick and the Vermont Jam ‘94 in Johnson and people were forced to listen to our music. Pretty cool experiences.

Pretty cool way to spend the summer. I like this state and I like a good percentage of the people who live here. It’s a damn hard place to make a living as a musician...especially if you want to make original music.

And last year I founded Split Records with my friend Brad Searles and we’ve put out five vinyl 45’s with a total of ten Burlington bands. They’re available at locally owned record stores throughout Vermont. We started Split to help out some of the bands that we were into. We send Split singles out to radio stations and press all around the country as a way of bringing attention to the bands and to the Burlington music scene. We’ve been written up in Atlanta and Seattle and North Carolina and California. And every article says “Good job, Burlington.” I’m into people hearing the music of my home. I’m into the idea that I know people who make music as totally brilliant as Famous Potato or Slush or the Pants. And I want to help them make more of it. If that’s what I can do, then I’ll do it. If you want to do better...well, I want you to do better. We will all gain if you do. But please...shut up and do it. Or help me do it. I don’t dig whiners or people who slam the hard work of other people. We can get that right out of the way: I’m into positive actions. And I’m not one of the “too cool” people who devote all their energies to tearing apart other peoples work. Sorry.

Enough already. This is our first issue and I hope that there will be many more. We will be a success if you find something in here that you want to go out and buy and we’ve helped divert some of your money to a Vermont artist. And, be a Good Citizen.




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PUZZ

a look at Vermont-made 'zines

by Brad Searles

Okay, so you walk into your local record store, comic shop, newsstand, whatever, and there's a pile of magazines all gathered together. Chances are that you usually ignore these magazines: they all look a little bit the same; they aren't gloss, they aren't full color and they aren't very expensive. Sometimes they're on colored paper, sometimes they even have one one color ink. You probably ignore them because you've never heard of them. Now you have.

What you overlooked is a pile of 'zines. Not short for magazines, but short for fanzines. Magazines are made by lots of people in an office somewhere far away. Fanzines are usually made by one person, sometimes more, in a bedroom or living room. And because they aren't tied into big, ugly corporations with massive worldwide distribution, most 'zines you'll find on the local racks were made by someone who lives close to you. Maybe someone you know, or someone who knows someone you know. Who knows?

That's the best thing about 'zines, and the very reason you shouldn't pass them by. They're local. They're personal. They're made by motivated folks who live near you and are taking the time to express themselves. Folks who are writing, or drawing, about things that might even be important to you. Things you can relate to. Things that might make you think, or laugh, or even feel bad. But they'll almost always make you feel something. So that's why I'm here. In each issue of Good Citizen, I'll be writing about different local 'zines, and the people behind them. To kick things off, I thought I'd take a quick look at a few 'zines I'll eventually be writing about. Keep in mind that, to varying degrees, the people who put these things out are friends of mine, so my "journalistic integrity" is out the window...

'Zine content is different from 'zine to 'zine, some writing, some writing and drawing and some almost all drawing. I'll try to briefly describe some of Vermont's more consistent ones.

First up is Durchsehen (it's pronounced dersh-sayin.)

which comes out every couple of months. Produced by Todd Kennedy, this 'zine is usually around 40 pages of writing...articles, lists, lots of random reviews of local and not-so-local music, 'zines and more. He just celebrated his first anniversary with issue #6.

I'm Not Action Johnny is Colin Clary's little 'zine. He's the guy that plays guitar and sings for the Madelines and he runs Sudden Shame Records, too. INAJ is all-writing, and usually just eight tiny pages, but hey, it's free and

fun to read! It's mostly a per-'zine (that's 'zine-speak for personal 'zine,) which means that it tells you what Colin and his friends are up to...but it usually has local music information and other reviews, too. Colin also has his own page in the Vermont Collegian, the bi-weekly state wide newspaper.

Next up is James Kochalka Superstar, a comic book from that occasionally twisted, always interesting guy, James Kochalka. Sometimes fictional, sometimes not, James relays stories about himself, Magic Boy, and an ever growing cast of characters. The comics range from all-out funny to oddly disturbing. Check out the latest issue of the nationally published Comics Journal for a huge write-up on James with compliments galore. James was also in the band Jazzin' Hell, and he has a new band called James Kochalka Superstar with a CD coming on the Dot Dot Dash record label, and he has a song on Split Records #4. Look for his comics in the Collegian as well, and a brand new one in the back of this issue of Good Citizen.

Poo-Poo Magazine brings us back to the mostly writing end of the 'zine spectrum. Packed with random rants, interviews, music and publication reviews...it's perhaps the area's most literately-meaty 'zine. It's also one of the only local 'zines with a "staff": Senior Editor M.C. Caucasian Pimp, Music Director Pope Homeslice IV, and Staff Writer Vanilla Christ. Poo-Poo also recently passed their one year anniversary with issue #7 and #8 came out in early January.

Back to comics, we have School Bus. Each issue is a collection of short stories drawn by Jason "Schoolbus" Cooley...part-time waiter, full-time music lover, full-time loser. Just kidding, Jason. Seriously, while Jason likes to

tell people how much his 'zine sucks, it actually doesn't. Like J.K. Superstar, a lot of the stories are based on Jason's very own messed-up experiences, and the rest come from who knows where. Jason is currently working on a mammoth 60 page comic epic. It may or may not be considered an official issue of School Bus, but it's sure to be pretty good.

Lastly, but certainly not leastly, is U.S. Herstoree, the Burlington area's only self-proclaimed "girl-zine." It's put out by Lila Rees, who slept through the photo-shoot for this article, so I put her in last (just kiddin', it's alphabetical.) Her 'zine is bi-monthly, featuring the infamous "I Hate Men" page, a few random reviews, lists, and the obligatory Lila update. The best thing about U.S.H., and this is true of most 'zines, is that Lila's not afraid to say what she loves, or what she hates. Her latest issue (#7) has a hysterical James Kochalka interview, plus some reprints of comics by James and Jason (love that 'zine incest.) and a whole bunch of other stuff.

Well, there you have it...a very quick run down of a few local 'zines. There are a few more out there, and I'll be writing about them in future issues of Good Citizen. Most of these 'zines are available in Burlington at Blue Suede News and Tones. Go buy 'em, tell the stores you read about them in Good Citizen, and if they make you think



Photo by Roger Lewis

"Hey! I can do this:" maybe I'll write about you, too.

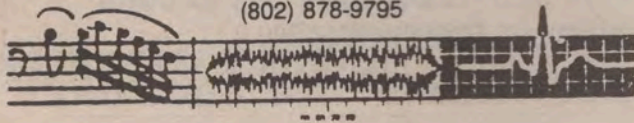
Brad Searles plays drums in Burlington band EEF, runs Club Fub Records, and writes a local music column for the Burlington Free Press (but please don't hold that against him!) He wrote this column at the very last minute as usual. Send your Vermont made 'zine to him care of Good Citizen.

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Friendly competition is essential to the development of great musicianship. Friendly competition can challenge an artist to continue creating.

Personally, I deplore seeing musicians looking down on other musicians: back biting and cliques. This is already a competitive business.

Sure, some musicians may be better than others, but growth comes from playing and the more players we have playing out, the better the music gets.

First off... ideas - as well as inspiration - come from playing with folks better than you are.

But, the reverse is also true: it makes for a bigger and stronger music industry when musicians inspire one another with their playing. All you have to do is pay attention to what other players are doing in your community. Listening to the younger

photo by Abrahams



know and listening to other players.

In other words, it makes good, music-business sense to let the musical experience go both ways. Otherwise, there can be problems and young players get the idea that they can't approach the older more experienced players.

Of course, the way we resolved it in the early years was we use to sit around and just play together. We had jam sessions. It's not that way anymore, but it should be. It would be good to see jam sessions happening like when I was young.

We jammed. We'd put up a sign - say at a festival. It simply said "Jam Session" which meant "everyone plays." No matter how badly they played. Then if they got blown off the stage, they'd go back home, work on getting it together and come back to the

words of wisdom from Big Joe Burrell

players is important - new blood, fresh concepts - sometimes this is just as good as practicing alone. Sharing what you

next jam session and try again.

Very seldom is this done anymore where any player will feel welcome to sit in.

columns

What I'm saying is that I want to see more opportunities, more *real* jam sessions. Not the kind of situations where the different groups get up and perform. It's not a real jam session, where different bands just take turns. It needs to get mixed more, otherwise it's just these cliques.

In this way, young musicians shouldn't feel scared to approach the bandstand and talk to me or any accomplished player. Jam sessions should be open to everyone, where everyone changes places takes turns, has a good time, blowing each other away with their best playing; with no-one putting down other groups and other players - this is the way to go.

This is the way the music gets better, more interesting and brings more folks out to listen; where more original work gets written and played. New material comes out of it. Bands can begin to play each other's pieces from within the community.

All you need to do is love one another. Don't look down on one another.

My mother used to say to me, "It doesn't cost you one dime to get along with one another."

Let the new musicians come on out into the music community and play and challenge us older players with their ideas. Let's resurrect real jam sessions.

Big Joe Burrell is Big Joe Burrell.



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photo by Eric Hutchinson



the name of this band is famous potato making sense of the spud

article by matthew taylor

in a listless world
of microwave dinners
and false prophets,
burlington cult heroes
famous potato
have transcended the
mundane, embraced the absurd
and, infected with grease,
agreed to explain all
in their own words

It's a cold and windy Saturday morning, early January in Burlington Vermont and six inches of fresh snow are swirling through a crowded marketplace. About a half block away, down at Henry's diner on Bank street Neil Cleary is poking thoughtfully at a plate of home fries and explaining, between sips of lukewarm Henry's coffee, how the death of Kurt Cobain last April has oddly affected his band, Famous Potato. "I think it freed us up to do a lot of different things," Cleary reasons, "seeing as a great energy had been released into the universe." Intrigued, I look up from my breakfast special and inquire.

"So the energy that Kurt possessed was actually released into the universe at the time of his death?" I ask, trying unsuccessfully to visualize an event of such magnitude. Neil's spectacled eyes slowly leave his plate and meet mine in a head-on stare.

"We like to think we're the sole inheritants."

David Kamm, lead singer and rhythm guitarist for the Burlington quartet, drops his fork to his plate and supports his drummer's assertion.

"It wasn't released into the universe at large," he explains. "It was released into the Potato's universe."

"That's right," adds Nicole Valcour, the band's bassist and most recent spud acquisition. "With a 60 c.c. syringe."

But jokes and irrelevant references to Seattle, pop culture, and the untimely passing of generational icons aside, Famous Potato, the two year-old spawn of red wine, caffeine, late nights, and electricity, is here to stay. And it is thriving. Or maybe it's mashing. Or baking. Whatever a potato in action does, this one is doing.

I'm sitting at the corner booth at Henry's with the members of the band, known affectionately in Burlington music circles as The Spud, enjoying, as the menus at Henry's invite us to, a little slice of Americana. Jamie Harvey, the band's lead guitarist, sits immediately to my right, followed in order by Cleary, Valcour, and Kamm.

The four which are the Potato have taken time from their schedule, which today has yet to include a practice session and still another interview, to shoot the breeze with me not just about deceased Nirvana singers, but a variety of other topics as well, from the Burlington music scene to firehose nozzles, lead pipes, and tin cans full of glass.

Famous Potato defies classification and in a musical world where labels are thrown around all too freely and rarely shed, this is a good thing. In a musical world where a band's identity is too often marred and defaced by a few hollow adjectives, Famous Potato is at a terrific advantage with no one but themselves to thank.

The band, whose nine song CD, *Milk and Motor Oil*, is due out later this month, has garnered strength and, over the course of the last two years, with a hefty blend of passion and perseverance, risen to the top of Burlington's burgeoning musical empire. But, while dedication and devotion are ever-important elements in the success of any creative endeavor, the quintessential ingredient in the Potato's blend is talent. And they have a lot of it.

David Kamm has been called "the thinking man's Jim Morrison on vocals" by *New England Performer* magazine (Dec. issue). Cleary's drumming is as creative and intricate as it is primal and hard driving. Kamm's guitar rhythms combine with the impressive tones of Harvey's lead work to captivate an audience with their brilliant ability to be at once melodic and abrasive, to poetically weave emotion between the delicate and the distorted. The penetrating vibration of Valcour's bass provides the pulsating beat which navigates the sound as it wraps and coils around the ethereal experience that is Famous Potato.

Eclectic is a word that seems to surface quickly when fans and critics discuss the Potato sound. Perhaps they take their place in some obscure realm with The Minutemen thrashing away on one side and a whiskey-drinking, chain-smoking Tom Waits sitting at the bar on the other. But the fact of the matter is that there is no real comparison. It's a little bit of this and a little bit of that and still a little more of that over there.

The band's success is found in their unique ability to harness chaos. It is found in the uncanny way that they are able to combine these various, sometimes calamitous sounds and noises and wrap them into one package which, though multi-faceted, successfully (and often incredibly) becomes cohesive upon hitting the stage. The Famous Potato sound has been likened to a machine getting angry at itself. While it is the anger that's brilliant, it is also the machine itself, and more importantly the process of that anger being inflicted back upon the machine, escalating the whole insane cycle to new heights and beyond.

Many bands are eclectic and many bands are talented and neither of these attributes necessarily render them successful. It is only through a band's ability to be creative with their talent and to take risks with their talent that real success is met. This is the measure of a true art form, whether the medium be literature, paint, sculpture, or music. Famous Potato have taken the risks and stretched their talents well beyond the ordinary realm of rock music. But, more than that they seem somehow to be in control of the risks they take. While they don't always appear to know exactly where they're going, Famous Potato has the ability to convince an audience that they know the whole time where they'll end up.

They assault onlookers with a relentless arsenal of noises which, upon threatening to disassemble completely and throw the entire event headlong into chaos, manage to weld together and operate consistently as a single powerful being. A melodic four-headed monster. Such is the mystique of the Spud. That and their ability to maintain a fragile balance between the real and the absurd, to laugh at themselves, to deviate from the norm and to realize what many bands seem to lose sight of somewhere along the way: that music should be, above all, a hell of a lot of fun.

Famous Potato has been together for a little over two years at this point?

Kamm: The concept has been alive for generations. Can you talk about what the early stages of the band were like.

Kamm: Well we have a video on sale currently illustrating

the early stages of the band. It was a predominantly 'in the basement of the Neil Cleary household' experience.

Cleary: No, well the first birth of the spud was at the R.P. basement..

Kamm: Do we want to change the location?

Cleary: I think the Last Elm Cafe is the first...

Kamm: Let's say it was at the Last Elm Cafe on a night when no one was there.

Cleary: No, we can't say that either. We decided to have the band.

Kamm: We decided to have the band. It was John Russell on Bass, Jamie Harvey on guitar, ...actually it was all guitar at first.

So it was more of a pickup, free form experiment?

Kamm: We didn't know that Neil played drums at this point.

Cleary: The goal in the mind of John Russell and in other members of the band was to have an electric folk rock band.

Kamm: Right.

Cleary: But that was the tortured dream of John Russell.

Harvey: Traditional folk.

Is that how the initial "Potato" sound got rolling?

Kamm: It was sort of a reaction to that.

Cleary: We never did that.

Kamm: We never did that because, first of all, I hate traditional folk music.

Cleary: Nicole, can you remember anything significant happening in your dreams around February of 94?

Valcour: I was dreaming about root vegetables...

Kamm: We got together and drank a lot of wine.

Cleary: After that we got together at my folks' house and just started playing.

The first memory I have of the Potato is at a Slade open mike in November of 92.

Harvey: That's right. That was the first.

What is the significance of "Famous Potato"?

Kamm: Let's just say I had nothing to do with the name. I came back from vacation from somewhere, I think it was Buffalo or Ithaca and I came back to a band that had named itself Famous Potato. Although I lived in Idaho and the Idaho licence plates say Famous Potato.

An Idaho licence plate was, at one point, used as a prop on stage, if I remember.

Kamm: Not only that but we were pummelled with potatoes at one or two gigs.

Was that traumatic? Do you want to talk about it?

Kamm: Well, it took a couple of months to clean up the mess off my guitar, my amp, my chords, ...in my shoes.

Who does most of the songwriting?

Kamm: I would say the band.

Is it a collective effort?

Cleary: The chrysalis, I would say, the pupas state of Famous Potato's hit, is in the long extended, free form Love jam.

That ethereal space, the quasi-sexual energy, as you put it?

Kamm: Right.

So it's not a case of David bringing a song he wrote and saying, 'let's play this.'? It evolves in the practice room?

Kamm: Initially we played a number of my songs that I had written and we just electrified them so we could have a set list but we don't play any of those songs anymore.

If you were to categorize your music, could you do it?

Harvey: Neo-Primitive Industrial Ragtime or we've also been likened to a machine getting angry at itself.

Cleary: Well it moved from neo-primitive industrial ragtime to grunge Apro-pop or Apro-pop grunge, if that's possible. Well it seems to me that that is one of the most endearing attributes of the band...

Cleary: Me, right?

Exactly. It's Neil's look when he's drumming. you always seem to have your good side facing the crowd.

Kamm: I look back and Neil always looks at me and says, 'you suck', and that makes me feel like I can do anything. It empowers you.

Kamm: Yeah, it does.

But seriously, it is such a diverse sound. There's the blues influence and then there's the distortion. I think I can still hear the electric folk element too, even if it's not necessarily what you're trying to do. Of all the bands I've heard in Burlington, you are perhaps the hardest to classify or categorize, which is very redeeming.

Kamm: I think that's how our audience feels too.

Cleary: A lot of sentences about Famous Potato begin, "No other band in Burlington..." I used to look forward to our first interview especially in the early dys because I could get off with a quote that says "Famous Potato plays at a level of musical prowess unseen before on the Burlington music scene. Unmatched.

Kamm: In fact, a compliment we have heard lately is that we are all good musicians.

Valcour: No, it's like this: I ain't sayin' you ain't good musicians or nothin'.... (group laughter)

Cleary: That's what we heard when we opened for Chin Ho! in St. Albans at J.W. Ryan's, a place that somebody had been shot at a couple of months earlier. We quickly moved to the back of the bar and I was sorting with the locals and one of them said repeatedly, "Well I'm sure you guys are all good musicians but, etc. etc."

Kamm: Well I was wearing a diaper on my head that night. I think that's what the problem was.

Do you have a long term vision for the band at this point or is it just to take things as they come?

Cleary: Total Thermo nuclear war.

Kamm: We're trying to get gigs outside of Burlington and see what happens.

Are you finding any luck in that direction?

Cleary: We have a couple of gigs.

Kamm: It seems we have a gig on April fool's day at Marlboro College and possibly a gig up in Montreal sometime soon.

Cleary: In the end of February in Montreal.

Is Famous Potato where you'd like it to be right now? What has the evolution over the last two years been like?

Harvey: What amazes me about it is that we continue to evolve and I don't see a stop to it. I'm not tired of anything and like you say the eclectic nature of it more and more influences things and I think its going places.

You mention the eclectic nature of the band and earlier that the audience also finds that important-that there is such a diversity of sounds and music brought into one package. Is that reflected in the type of crowd? Could you categorize your audience?

Valcour: The audience is usually characterized by the other band we're playing with. (Laughter)

Kamm: We don't really always have a choice, although I think we have a lot of fans that spend an inordinate amount of time at the Last Elm Cafe. I don't know if they come to our shows any more though, because I don't think they like

to pay to see music. And I think for some reason we have a lot of younger fans now too.

Cleary: Young freaks. It attracts a kind of people who, what should I say?

Valcour: Misfits?

Cleary: Closet misfits, like people who you think are very normal but have an extremely strange streak, people who you wouldn't expect to get into it but do.

Over the last couple of years, Burlington music has become more unified. It feels like there's a lot more going on, maybe more unity between bands with the emergence of Club Fub, and the Sounds Around Burlington project, Split Records and the stuff Brad Searles is doing, in terms of bringing a lot of different talents together and recognizing that there is a lot of creativity in this town that's maybe been more spread out until recently. How much of that has to do with Burlington itself being a fertile ground for an and coming music scene and how much is simply a reflection of the times and the state of music around the country?

Valcour: I haven't been in Burlington for very long but I've known Burlington for a long time and the music scene has exploded over the last couple years. The amount of really talented musicians in this small town I think is unusual. I don't know why they're all here. I mean, it's cold in the winter and...I don't know if it's a good place to start these small businesses like Tones, and Club Fub and all that. I think that the fact that there's so much of it going on is really amazing and exciting and I think there's a huge community within bands and that sort of thing which I've been impressed with so much since I've been here. There's so much support for each other and a real love for home-grown music. I think it's unusual.

Harvey: Well that part really amazes me, that people are so supportive, because so many bands have been helpful with us and the communication exists. People want to get together and play with each other and I think in other scenes that doesn't really happen. I've talked to other bands from other places and they say that doesn't exist as much. Hardly at all.

So the presence of a scene doesn't take away from a band's own identity?

Valcour: It's very nurturing in this town.

Kamm: Well the scene is so diverse, and each band does have its own identity that is primarily concerned with. It doesn't seem to be a slide toward any kind of homogeneous Burlington sound. I don't see that happening, but I think that one of the big reasons the scene is existing is because of Toast. That place is a huge supporter of local music. If you have your shit half way together, you can get a gig. If you want to get up on stage and play, you can and you don't have to pay.

Is there a responsibility of a band within a local scene? Are you responsible for continuing to create a scene or does it create itself?, a responsibility to other bands, to audiences?

Cleary: First of all, I tend to think there's a very good scene, but then again I'm inside it. But to me, it sort of depends on what you think is a good thing to do when good things happen to you. How do you spread it around or how much of yourself do you give back to it? It is definitely spiritually healthy to give back to it, to give other people the opportunities you've been given. Simple ways. For instance, we got to play at Toast or Metronome by opening up for someone so just to do that for someone else also. On the same level if you put out a bad feeling, its going to come back haunt you in a very direct way.

Harvey: What he's trying to say is that we're motivated by fear.

A couple of questions about the lyrical aspects of Famous Potato. First off, how much do the lyrics matter? Is there a message or a point you're trying to get across?

Kamm: I think the lyrics come about in a way similar to how the music comes about. What starts as being being jam-oriented or non-sensical is somehow turned into a form and the form itself sometimes creates meaning and sometimes the meaning is wonderful. But I think it depends on the song. Certain songs really do have a story

behind them and there is something definitely attached to that intention. It's not just [David at this point makes a series of primal/alien mumbling noises that this interviewer is unable to recreate in writing], it's not just that.

Cleary: Its not consistent either. It's not like one person writes the lyrics. Nicole and Jamie and David have collaborated, and David and I have collaborated. Jon and David have collaborated.

So the songwriting is entirely a group effort?

(The four Potatoes nod.)

The band's original bassist, John Russell, left the band in the spring of 94. What were the circumstances surrounding his departure?

Kamm: Do you know something about John that we don't?

Harvey: I thought we covered that earlier didn't we? He was carrying Kurt Cobain's lovechild.... I think it was a matter of devoting time and us realizing what an important project we were undertaking and that we wanted to gear up for it and continue to write even more. Since he himself is such an eclectic man, he didn't have the time to devote as much as we and he would have liked.

Cleary: David and Jamie and I, I think we have more of a musical background than Jon and so it makes sense that we continue on doing that. John started to play because we had the band. [To Kamm] You were saying something about the feeling he gave to the original set up.

Kamm: Oh yeah, John's influence on the sound that we continue to try and work out is pretty big and I think he just looked at music in a very different way. I don't know if I know how to explain. I don't know if I want to. He looks at things geometrically and his bass lines are based on shapes and sizes rather than necessarily sounds so I think some of the early Potato songs are very mechanical sounding and machine like in a great way.

And some of that is definitely still with you.

Kamm: Oh yeah.

Harvey: I think also, the emotion that Jon brought was huge. He would strike a bass string and I would shake. I could feel the emotion. He would wail and it would work.

Kamm: A firehose nozzle was one of the props he would use to play the bass.

Was there a lag time between John's departure and Nicole's arrival?

Cleary: Wasn't there a lag time of about 48 hours?

Kamm: I think 48 hours.

Valcour: Well I heard you all were trying to get a bassist but he left town, so as second choice and with no other way, they let me play....as a favor to me until someone else could be found.

Cleary: You're so humble.

Kamm: Nicole was playing in a band called Mona at the time.

Was that March of 94?

Harvey: March or April.

Kamm: When I first moved to Burlington about three years ago, I answered an add and I didn't understand the add. It was, what did it say?

Valcour: It was my sister and I and we put a sign up that said 'two women, and two cats seek a housemate.'

Kamm: Seek. But I thought it said 'geek'. 'Two women, two cats, geek housemate' and I thought, okay, I can do that.

Cleary: I think that's when the Potato first got started first started actually.

Does it feel as if things have really taken off in that time since April?

Harvey: I think the band has taken a real big directional turn recently and I guess you kind of tie it all together.

You've recently finished recording a CD that will be out soon. The feeling I got from listening to it is that it captures your live sound quite well. Was that the goal?

Valcour: We played it all live.

Cleary: The last fifteen minutes, which is a quarter of the time on it I realized only when I got it back, was this thing that we didn't plan out. We just started recording. We played like we normally play in practice so I think its sort of like the raw and the cooked from what it begins with to what it ends up with. The first song, Inkwell, is one of those ready-for-prime-time crafted songs and then at the other end is the raw material. I think in that way, I'm very happy with the sound.

Valcour: We ease people into it.

It seems that the choice of songs, the lengths and the general feel of the album is as eclectic as your sound itself, if that makes any sense. It's a little bit of everything. Rather than just having one type of song or having each song fit some 'Famous Potato' format, there is really no set format, which I think is a wonderful quality and maybe what you are shooting for.

Harvey: I just wanted to say something about the way we work together in what Neil was talking about. We're all individuals but there's an incredible sensitivity that we all feel for each other. It happens during live performances and certainly when we just play. People will shift into something and it's amazing. That's how we can all communicate. People say how tight we are and very well we're not that tight, it's just that we're listening to each other and we all really feel each other's times and because of that sensitivity, it perceives tightness.

You all tolerate each other fairly well it seems.

Valcour: There's the occasional fist fight, but other than that...

Cleary: Good Times, bad times, we've had our share.

Kamm: I think though, you asked if we're a live band and are we primarily a live band. I think that's the reason that we're playing -because we want to play live. I don't see the plan of a band that would just record songs and then that would be it. It's a real charge to play with these people and, you know, playing on stage is great because it's so fucking loud. (laughter) I'm serious about that. The energy of really loud music is powerful. I think that's something that has changed within the band. When we first started out we were kind of secret and tricky and stuff and really vague. We would play with a lot of emotional energy but we really didn't play that hard and I think that's kind of changed in the last two years. I think we put out a lot more.

Maybe filling out your sound more completely?

Kamm: Yeah.

Cleary: It's funny. I've thought about that, and in the beginning we didn't have serious sound hooked up, but in a way, it led us to be a lot harsher. The sound was a lot more harsh, but now it seems like we're used to playing through a big system. It seems like it's a lot more subdued, passionate stuff. I don't know if that makes any sense, that we're less likely to have a harsher sound.

Kamm: Well we had fewer effects when we first started. (Neil and David laugh) I think all we did was distortion and clean, no echo, no reverb. We had a lot of really jangly songs.

Cleary: Well, my drums had more than just distortion.

Kamm: Neil would tape things to his drum set. He had a big steel pipe that he would hit his drums with. It was about three feet long.

And that's no longer used?

Cleary: No, that's one big change for me is that I would play anything in the beginning and now I bought a really nice drum set so....

So you became more conservative?

Cleary: Yeah. Well, in a way. I worry about that. In a way more conservative, but in a way trying to explore stuff with a more basic sound. Because I wouldn't be able to play the same kit from song to song.

Kamm: He had a cookie tin with broken glass in it as part of the kit.

To throw out another Burlington oriented question, could you do what you're doing successfully in a bigger city like Boston or New York?

Kamm: I think maybe more successfully.

Harvey: I think of what Dennis (Wygans of Club Toast) said which was you had to have big ears to listen to Famous Potato and I think that's true.

Valcour: I'm not sure if the Potato has found its audience yet. I'm not sure if Burlington is the audience. I think Burlington's so hot and cold with the Potato. I don't know if that's because of other things or what.

Cleary: Well, I don't know. It could get appreciated in a larger city because there's a bigger population and you'd think you'd have a bigger subculture, but in a way, I don't know about the others but I can't imagine playing in a city because I'm not a city-oriented person. I'd be a lot more scared to play in a city. I can play music here because there's more opportunity and I don't have to be so boisterous, do you see what I'm saying? I grew up not having to be so pushy and so I think that the quaintness of the area fosters people who wouldn't normally play music. I don't know if I'd be in a band if there weren't so many opportunities to play.

I think Burlington is unique in that way. It seems, as I said earlier, that there is so much talent and creativity that has been harnessed over the last couple years, with Toast and everything they're doing to reach out to up and coming acts. It's very welcoming to have the opportunity to express yourself. Whereas in a bigger city, while the audience may be larger, you probably would not find the same grassroots support that you do in Burlington. On the downside, does Burlington run the risk of being perceived as a dead end for the same reasons?

Valcour: I think it remains to be seen whether or not Burlington's a dead end because other parts of the world are starting to notice Burlington. I think it can either be a springboard or a hometown for a lot of people.

Cleary: It's funny. I think music has become so much more decentralized these days in terms of smaller labels coming out and I think in Burlington it seems, at times, like there's no where to go. For example, if there were a local radio station that played local music and the press focused more on local music, there would be so many more places to go. Rather than looking up to a big label or up to a big star and having them feed you what you need, to look around to local music you could go a lot further that way.

Harvey: I think it's happening. Even WIZN recently keyed in on the local music scene. The press has started to pick up on it.

Famous Potato played at the 24/7 shows at Club Toast which featured 28 different local bands over four nights. That received a fair amount of coverage at least around New England. It was on the cover of *New England Performer*. It seems to me that Burlington is gaining some recognition and it will be interesting to see what course that continues to take. Do you want to talk at all about the CD?

Valcour: I thought the recording of that was a blast. It was in some ways extremely tedious, but in other ways it was a whole lot of fun. We just had a weekend where we really communicated. Laying down the music and putting it down the way we wanted to hear it was the easy part.

What was the hard part?

Valcour: Mixing it down and mixing it down and mixing it down.

Cleary: And mixing it further down.

Kamm: Diluting it completely.

Valcour: Thirteen mixes of "Potato Blues."

Kamm: The mechanics of assembling a bunch of noises

so that it approaches the sound that we try and create live is rather time consuming. We recorded it in one place, did vocals in another place, mixed it in the place where we did vocals, and sequenced it somewhere else and this is our first time doing this. It seemed kind of ridiculous to me to do all this stuff in different places although I guess I hadn't really considered it when we first started, what it would be like. But, it's a process. It's a difficult thing to sit and listen to a song for an hour or so while mixing. It's a difficult thing. At this point, I don't really want to hear the songs. I've heard these songs so many times over the last six months. We started recording in the middle of July.

Cleary: Recording is like performing in that you learn how to play yourself, then you perform and you fuck up and then you learn how to perform and it becomes smooth. And this is our first time recording.

But generally you're happy with the process, despite its tedious nature. Are you happy with the product?

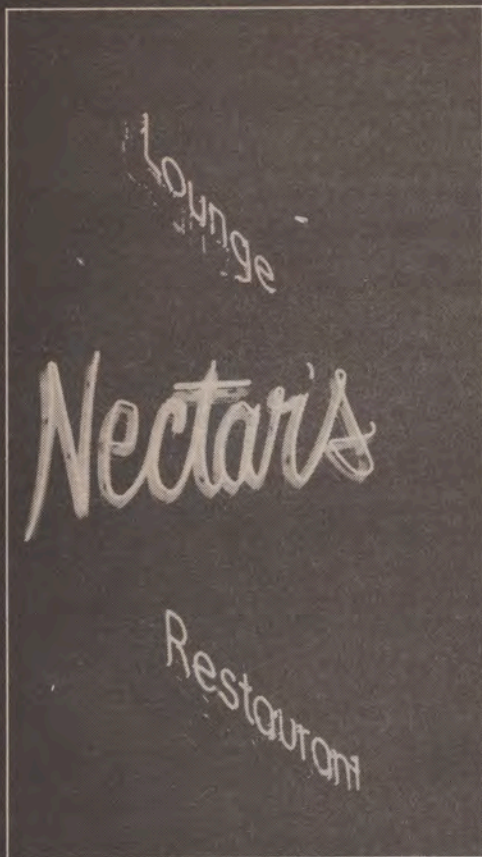
Kamm: Yes. I think that the key thing about it all is that the original tracks, the original takes, were very strong and that came through on the final product. You can always go back and say "Oh, I screwed up there" but I think those places have become attractive to us all.

Valcour: There are some beautiful screw ups.

* * *

[As this article goes to press, Famous Potato continue to pursue their goal of conquering the world as we know it. However, they are currently in the process of searching for and auditioning potential drummers. Neil Cleary, who is still pounding the skins for the Potato as this is being written, will soon be leaving the band to pursue other musical interests. Neil will continue drumming for The Pants, another sensational local band, with whom he also plays. Meanwhile, Famous Potato, with no intention of slowing its pace, doesn't plan to miss a step while working to fill the rather large shoes which will be left by Cleary's impending departure.]





Downtown Burlington seems abandoned and too cold 'round midnight, mid-winter, mid-week, now that holiday festivities have ended.

So, after dropping off a movie near Ben & Jerry's, we realize we need fries with gravy and a check-in with friends before heading home.

The slow, steady spin of Nectar's neon signals us; our assurance of friendly conversation and a live performance by one of our favorite Vermont bands (increasingly, the best alternative to national, commercial tube.)

"People like it that they can count on Nectar's," remarks Ann Rothwell, owner of the Metronome. "His (Nectar Rorris) friendly personality is wrapped into this business." She pauses reflectively, rests her chin on her hand, squints at the ceiling with a slight smile.

Then, bringing her hand down on the desk, states emphatically, "He's my mentor. I wouldn't be here if it weren't for Nectar. That's for sure. Nectar's is the foundation of The Metronome. Our address reads 'Above Nectar's.' We don't even have a sign. That's how much of an institution he is.

"He's a steady force in the community. You may not always like the music, but you like the fries." Yet, as Rothwell clarifies, "fries aren't all Nectar's is famous for."

Phish, Chin Ho!, FreeFall, Blues for Breakfast, Texas Twisters and a multitude of other local musicians pay respect to the noble and friendly Greek-Vermont, not just because of his good business sense and involvement with his work - many days Rorris is at the restaurant/club/bar 16 to 18 hours straight; but, primarily because he recognizes and supports the belief that local talent draws in regular customers 365 days a year.

So, if a local group has a good act together, and they're not so loud they drive customers away - he'll give them a break.

Over the years, a lot of great bands have taken themselves seriously, and put their act together. Nectar's Restaurant and Bar, encouraged and started off many bands with their first gigs.

Eventually, many have gone and/or will move forward to gain a larger audience in the broader music industry.

In 1995 at Nectar's, we don't have to wait for outside bands to drive up from Boston or New York to entertain us. Nor does Rorris make us pay an extra charge to see our local talent. We don't even need to wait for them to get famous and come back and charge us big bucks. They're here every night of the week - at Nectar's.

"Some of these bands should move on," Rorris frowns. "Sometimes, it's too expensive for some bands to make a CD, to promote themselves and go to the next level."

Decidedly, Rorris fills an important need for the grass-roots cultural growth of our community.

Nectar's books bands when they are good, ready, and willing to follow the rules; playing the game as professional musicians would be expected to do anywhere in the country, or in the world, for that matter.

In that sense, he's not just a 'mentor' for Ann Rothwell and Metronome, but for professionally minded bands as well; providing a training ground for the profession, as well as growth and development of different bands' musical material.

"I think we've been lucky, because there are a lot of good local musicians. And they are putting good bands together," Rorris concludes. "And (here) they have a house to play."

Jeff Miller, from The Burlington Coffeehouse at City Market, believes "Nectar is a small god! He should be given an award for sticking with local musicians. I also think there's a part of him that needs to do it."

In fact, this may well be the case.

In the Greek village where Nectar Rorris grew up, music was a part of the daily ritual each morning in school. He experienced a variety of musical styles through live performances with school mates and throughout the community; experiences viewed as a natural part of his life and the community's culture.

Now, through his life's work and business, he's made sure live musical performances continue to be a real part of his life; to our advantage.

"Music gives you life," says Rorris. "It peps you up to some degree. My grandfather use to say, 'reading feeds the brain and music give you inspiration and motivation.' I believe it is important and that it should be taught in schools. Music gives some kind of life. It's healthy..."

In 1975, Nectar's opened, sold, then returned to the tune of 15 years in total, helping to create the Burlington music-scene.

Modestly, he's quick to recognize a history of worthy Burlington clubs which preceded his establishment; those who gave frequent and steady gigs to local artists... "Minerva's, The Sting, The Outback, Hunt's, Silver Keg, The Red Dog, The Lighthouse, Sam's, and a club that use to be above Fremont's jewelry."

Is there a success formula Rorris operates from?

"Original (music) is my favorite," Rorris explains. "And change is healthy. It's good for the economy.. Different bands...different crowds.

"Female vocalists add a lot. We have several bands with female vocalists. It's a different feeling. The (crowds) respect the women performers.

"When people read in the papers - we have different bands every night," he says, "it makes it more interesting for people to look into. Their curiosity brings them in when they look in the club notes in all the papers.. 'Oh, look! There's another; a different band's playing at Nectar's. Let's go see it!'" He smiles.

"I don't know what it is," He admits. "We have a lot of good bands in the area. Maybe it's something in the water. I don't know. I wish we had more days of the week, so we could play all the different bands."

From all accounts, observations and conversations - the evidence is clear Rorris recognizes, and respects musicians as professionals, with a vital role to play as members of the community.

"They're treated like all my other employees., and (it's) expected for them not to look down on the waitstaff... nobody's better than anyone else..." Rorris admits he's had to say to bands members they couldn't play unless they had it together.

"Sometimes I had a little problem with a band, and I'd have to say, 'Look, you've gotta cool it! You're still an employee. You're doing a job. Your job is as a musician.'" Rorris explains.

"I like to deal with the nice guys in the bands. They should respect me, as well, from a business point of view. And they should respect the employees of Nectar's... I like to see a family type atmosphere - a unity, understanding."

As for other house rules for bands: if they have to change plans, he's flexible - "if they're going to make more money, like for a wedding; if they can't find a replacement band, I'll help them out and find another band."

Rorris doesn't like a lot of equipment. "We have our own PA system. This isn't an auditorium...I like to control the volume to some degree... Not to drive the people out of the place.

"They can bring in their own lighting and sound people. They can put some things like suitcases down in the basement, out of the way, instead of in the hallway." And, in addition...

"There's room enough for up to eight musicians on the bandstand. There's easy access to double-park out front anytime of the day, so the bands can get set up instead of fighting with the marketplace... It's pretty quiet in here during the time the bands are setting up.

"Also, we're laid back...low key... I could have invested in fixing the place up. But this is comfortable for people.... Quiet during the day for private meetings, a way from the main- drag, so to speak. Then we're busy with the bar and different local musicians seven nights a week..."

"There are just a few guide lines," Rorris concludes. "I like the bands to start on time; they play four sets at 55 minutes each. On Saturday, at 9:20 sharp, bands are expected to begin that way, they can complete four sets."

So, like the Chin Ho! song says: "Meet me at Nectar's... Better come early."

Patricia Braine's photographs and articles about musicians have been published locally and nationally since 1972.



FREEFALL PHOTO BY PATRICIA BRAINE



GEORGE PETIT QUARTET, above
BREAKAWAY, top right
FORTUNE TELLERS, bottem right
MADELINES, insert next page
- PHOTOS BY JEDD KETTLER

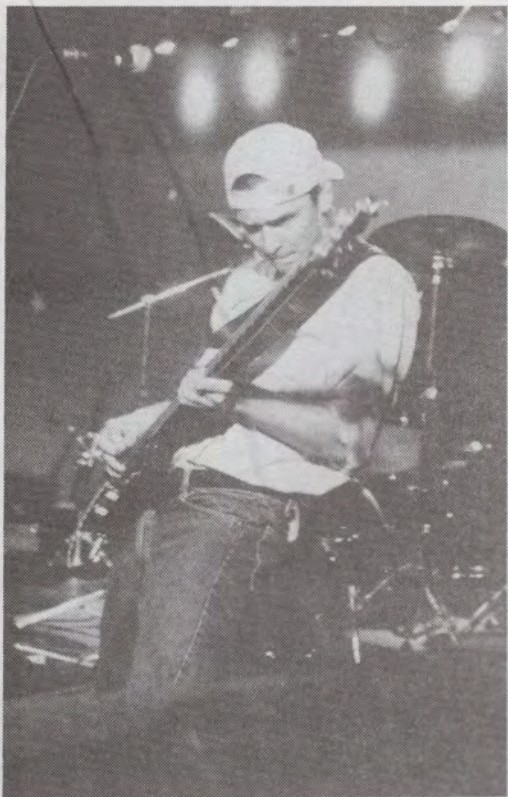


WIDE WAIL PHOTO BY ERIC HUTCHINS



SLUSH
PHOTOS BY
PATRICK SANTINI





COLOR BLIND PHOTO BY ERIC HUTCHINS

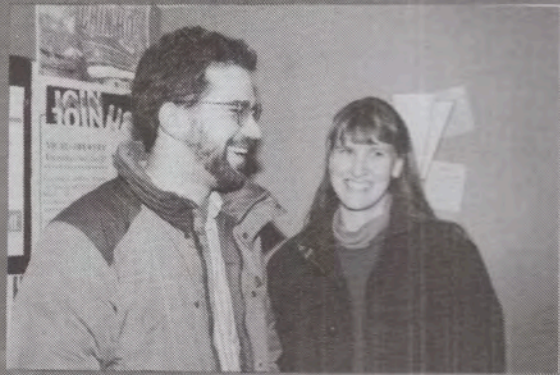
THE PANTS PHOTO BY JEDD KETTLER

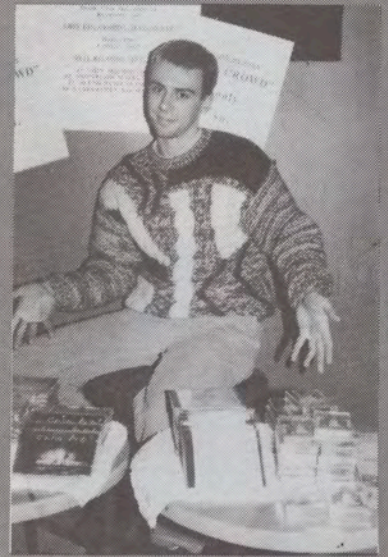


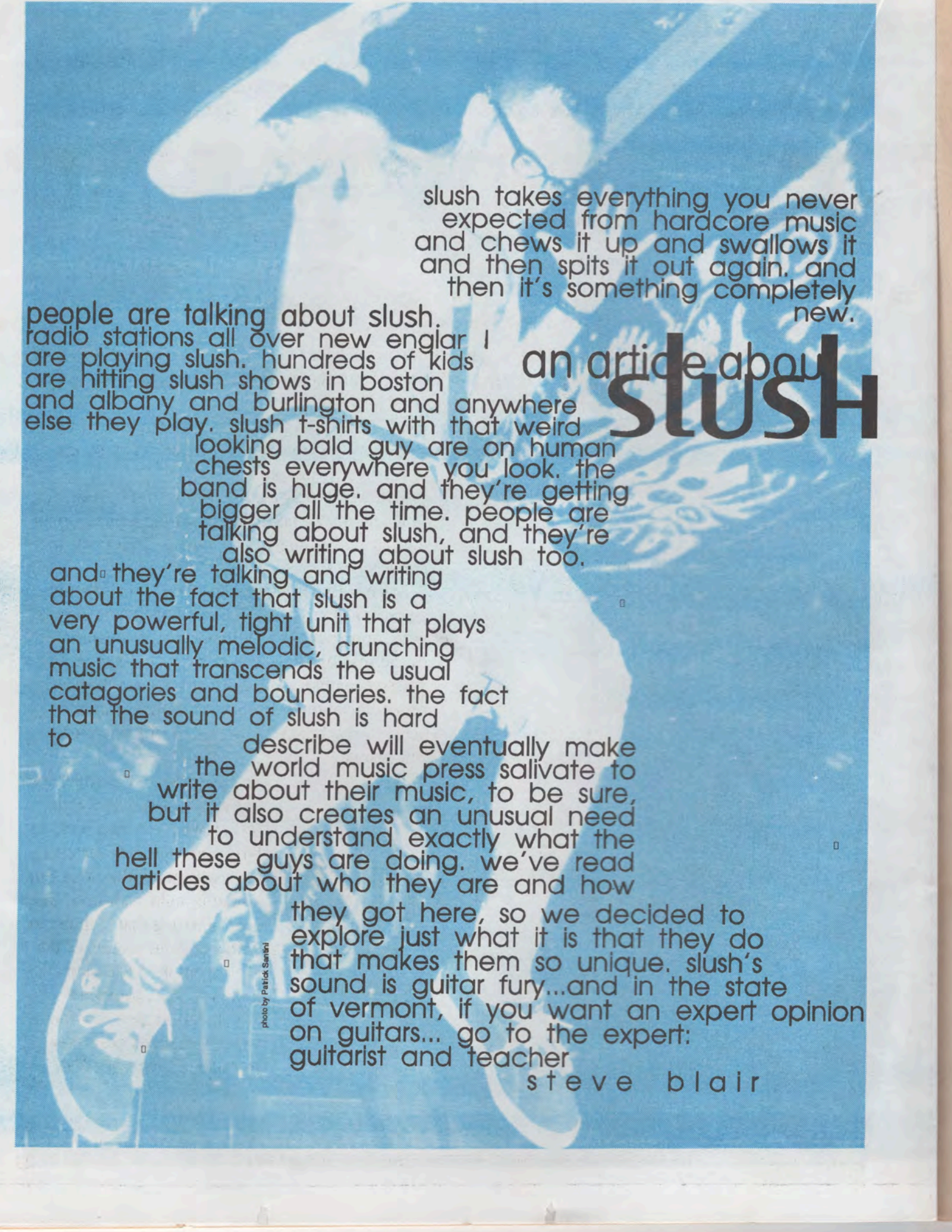
NEXT PAGE .. CHIN HOI CD RELEASE PARTY
PHOTOS BY MARK SASAHARA
INSERT PHOTOS BY PATRICIA BRAINE
left to right, JEFF & RITA ANGIONE OF
TONES MUSIC; ERIC HUTCHINS,
TOM LAWSON, COLT RIENECKE;
HIPLOCK GUITARIST JASON DUNN



JAMES KOCHALKA SUPER STAR PHOTO BY JOSH LEVY







slush takes everything you never expected from hardcore music and chews it up and swallows it and then spits it out again, and then it's something completely new.

people are talking about slush.

radio stations all over new england are playing slush. hundreds of kids are hitting slush shows in boston and albany and burlington and anywhere else they play. slush t-shirts with that weird looking bald guy are on human chests everywhere you look. the band is huge, and they're getting bigger all the time. people are talking about slush, and they're also writing about slush too.

and they're talking and writing about the fact that slush is a very powerful, tight unit that plays an unusually melodic, crunching music that transcends the usual categories and boundaries. the fact that the sound of slush is hard to

describe will eventually make the world music press salivate to write about their music, to be sure, but it also creates an unusual need to understand exactly what the hell these guys are doing. we've read articles about who they are and how

they got here, so we decided to explore just what it is that they do that makes them so unique. slush's sound is guitar fury...and in the state of vermont, if you want an expert opinion on guitars... go to the expert: guitarist and teacher

steve blair

an article about slush

A is for Apple, B is for Boy and P is for Phrygian. Have you ever heard that the Phrygian mode makes dogs howl and women go crazy? Just try playing a major scale from 3 to 3 (mi to mi) and see how a fairly harmless, sweet sounding scale immediately transforms into a dark, sensuous,

ex. 1

∇ = $\frac{1}{2}$ step
 \square = whole step

* scale degrees compared to a major scale

potentially demonic series of tones. (example 1.)

It's the resultant half-step first that makes the minor scale (mode) different from all the other commonly known minor scales, and is highly used by Spanish flamenco musicians (who sometimes call it the Andalusian mode) and also by many heavy metal oriented players.

Whether intentional or not, many of Slush's tunes on the CD seem to sway toward this side of the tonal spectrum. In the first cut, "Mass Appeal", this is immediately apparent in the ostinato set up by the bass guitar. (example 2.)

ex. 2

scale degrees: 1 5 1 5 \flat 2

TAB

The key of E is clearly defined with a root, 5th. foundation. The last note F adds the sinister sounding flat 2 scale degree that the Phrygian mode most characterizes.

As bassist Tom Dunn continues this ostinato, guitarists Denny Donovan and Todd Dunn along with drummer Gary Williams annihilate this mysterious opening section with a barrage of massive textures. The guitarists deviate from any set combination of tones with wailing primal screams reaching into the depths of a microtonal dimension.

ex. 3

TAB

After several plunges into this chaotic landscape with Jeff Howlett entering with lyrics appropriately matching the sonic mood, they kick into a suction-tight, industrial-like groove with guitars joining in with a chordal version of the already implied half-step motion E to F. (example

Later, as they shift into a super high speed gear, they modulate to the key of G,

again with half-step motion before bringing it back to E for the final kill. These guys are obviously not preparing for a quiet dinner out with mom.

My favorite part of the recording happens on the title track: "Step Inside". After a powerful intro with sustained, lush chords, the band breaks down into another repeating bass pattern.

Again, the half-step motion is present (and again in the key of E) but this time, the scale that's outlined is not purely Phrygian but has a major 3rd and a flatted 5th (example 4.)

Shortly after the vocals enter, I'm pulled refreshingly into a double guitar riff that ventures off the beaten trail.

While one guitar lays down a pretty straight-ahead Root-5th. pattern (E and B), the other explores less safe terrain with major 7ths. (D#) and interchanging major and minor 3rds. (G# and G) (ex. 5). In a way, this almost suggests the key of A-flat (D# = E-flat 5th-G# = A-Flat Root) against the key of E, which in a round-about way implies the technique of Bi-tonality (2 keys at once) that was used heavily by Stravinsky, Ives and other Neo-Classical composers. As mentioned before, who knows how they came up with this but hey, it sounds great and can't I fantasize a little bit? If only more bands like this utilized such

concepts more often it might keep the ears awake beside the use of mega-decibels. On "Find Yourself", check out the rhythmic time shifts. Though it could be a simple 4/4

ex. 4

1 b2 3 b5

E F G# B^b

TAB

0 0 1 0 1 0 4 0 0 0 1 0 1 0

ex. 5

GUITAR 1

GUITAR 2

TAB

GUITAR 1

GUITAR 2

time at the top, there's also a suggested sub-division of 3/8 and 5/8 if counted twice as fast. This equals 8/8 or 4/4 anyway, but this rhythmic twist adds nice shape to the feel. (ex. 6).

ex. 6

TAB

Thrashing into the vocal section, they get angular with a 6/8 to 8/8 pattern which breaks down to 7/4. As these two sections rotate, the band finds interesting ways to vary the textures and energy levels while still maintaining the original rhythmic structure.

"Soil", verging on the psychedelic side, trudges forward with a near-dirge conviction as subtle references to early seventies classic rock standards rear their ugly heads.

To summarize, I'm hearing some Phrygian, some micro-tonality, multi-rhythmic layering... And I know this all sounds pretty pompous, but this is where it's at from a musical standpoint. Denny Donovan and Todd Dunn demonstrate a knowledge of musical technique that a lot of bands would die for: and they make it look like it's the most natural thing in the world. Did Bach really know what he was creating? Did Hendrix and Santana know that the scale they used frequently is called the Dorian scale? Your enjoyment of the music should have little to do with the theories used to compose it. And as you probably know, there's no such thing as the key of P anyway. There is, however, an amazing amount of power, presence and pleasure on the new compact disc from Slush.

Steve Blair is a professor of Jazz at Johnson State and University of Vermont. He is also the leader of the band Freefall.



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the story of pinhead



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Tom Lawson: Before He Wore The Pants

by Zachary Ward

There once was a band called Chainsaws of Babylon. Four guys from UVM who banded together to create a unique and virtually undefinably quirky urban folk sound. The Chainsaws packed rooms like Burlington's border and 242 and recorded several brilliant projects before moving to California and eventually disbanding. As part of our effort to chronicle and document the Vermont music scene throughout the years, we'll be targeting bands that we feel made a real impact on the history of our musical world. So we sent Eef's Zach Ward to find the Chainsaws and get the story.

Tom Lawson was one of those Chainsaw guys. He is now in The Pants, one of Burlington's hottest alternative acts. I caught up with Tom on an evening when the Pants were playing at Club Toast on lower Church Street. Tom took some time out of his busy evening to answer some questions. The following interview took place within the cold confines of Club Toasts "Band Room".

G.C.-So how did it all begin?

T.L.-The Chainsaws started in Living And Learning (a UVM dorm) in the year of 1989, I believe, if I'm correct, with Doug North, myself, and Jason Young playing acoustic guitars. And we started playing at Slade Hall. We did that for a year or so, maybe more than that.

G.C.-Did you play open mics?

T.L.-We played open mics, we played around town a couple of times, at City Hall, The Last Elm, a couple of parties, things like, and then we did a tour of rest areas all around the United States one summer. When we returned back to Vermont we decided to get a little more serious.

G.C.-You really went on an acoustic tour?

T.L.-well.. we did the rest areas so no one heard us.

G.C.-What were the dates?

T.L.-Well, we went North. We were in... well, I remember Pennsylvania, I remember parts of Ohio, I remember Mt. Rushmore, we played on the banks of the Colorado River, in Arizona, and California. We played in Texas.

G.C.-You don't remember some of the tour?

T.L.-I don't remember any of it; the whole trip.

G.C.-It sound like a fun trip.

T.L.-Yeah, it was. I don't remember much about it at all. That was where we got the name The Chainsaws Of Babylon. Before that we were the Zen Masters Of Warp Drive. It was on our first night of that trip that we decided that we would be the Chainsaws Of Babylon. So we came back to Burlington, hung out, and started practicing more and more. We started playing with the bass and the electric guitar. We advertised for a drummer, and Billy Glassner hopped on board.

G.C.-I heard that he was the only drummer who auditioned.

T.L.-Yeah, he was the only guy. He called us two hours after we had put up the poster. So we started playing with him and things really took off.

G.C.-Were you three guys all from Vermont?

T.L.-Yes, we were all from Vermont, and Jason and Doug lived together in Living And Learning. They were doing there thing, and I was their drinking their beer and hanging out. Sleeping on their floor (laughs). So one thing led to another and we ended up in a band.

G.C.-So Billy signed on...

T.L.-So Billy signed on and we started playing Slade Hall and downtown. We opened up for Ninja Custodian at Border...

G.C.-I remember the first time I saw The Chainsaws with Billy. It was in Marsh dining hall at UVM.

T.L.-Marsh. That's right. With Malayalam.

G.C.-Right.

T.L.-And things started taking off from there. Things went really well. We recorded a couple of things.

G.C.-You recorded your first album Electric #1?

T.L.-We recorded Electric #1 and we also had a couple of other things we were screwing around with. And we were all psyched about it so we decided to move out to California. And we moved out to California. Oh yeah, before we moved

out to California, Paul, who had done the engineering on Electric #1 and a couple other things we did, moved out to California. He was going to help us get some gigs out there and stuff. Before we left, things with Billy came to sort of a crossroads, and we all decided that it was time to part ways. We didn't know what we were going to do, and so I decided to play drums, and Pistol was out in California, so he hopped on bass.

G.C.-So push came to shove and Billy didn't want to move to California?

T.L.-Well, as eventually happened with the Chainsaws, too, we didn't feel comfortable expressing our ideas to each other. After awhile you can't really operate that way.

G.C.-So take me back to Oakland.

T.L.-Well...I moved out there, and for four or five months Pistol and I lived in San Francisco. We were looking for a warehouse space and we found one in Oakland. And then the other guys moved out and we started playing and practicing in this kinda cool renovated warehouse space in deepest, darkest Oakland.

G.C.-I've heard it was grim while you guys were there.

T.L.-It was fairly grim. It was mostly grim because the section of town that we were living in was in the process of being "gentrified", and we were definitely a part of that. And we didn't know it at the time. And our landlord was kind of crazy, and we didn't know that at the time. We didn't really know what was going to happen. We all lived in this warehouse and it was one big room. We all thought it was going to be big enough, but by the time we moved out it felt like a little tiny room because there weren't any walls or anything like that.

G.C.-Did you have a studio set up there?

T.L.-It was a recording studio at one point in time so there was a control room, soundproofed, that we used as our practice room. And we did some recording there that was alright, but I think the Chainsaws kinda pushed it a little too hard. We started out as really good friends, and, creatively, we reached a point where we weren't talking to each other. We were worried about hurting each other's feelings. All kinds of shit.

G.C.-And trying to deal with the city at the same time.

T.L.-And we were living in a crazy, crazy, crazy neighborhood, trying to get jobs in a place where we didn't know what the hell was going on. Big city. Huge music scene. We were just totally unprepared for what we found. We were just completely not ready. And personally we were all at points where we were re-evaluating where we were at, too. So I decided to split. I couldn't handle California anymore.

G.C.-Doug North said you decided to split and then you changed your mind.

T.L.-I decided to split, and then we were talking about it and thinking about different options as a band, and what we could do. Because I always, definitely, have attention deficit disorder, so I was getting sick of playing the drums. We tried to work it out for awhile, and figure it out, and we finally talked about it and I decided to stay. And five hours after I decided to stay I got mugged in San Francisco, so I took it as an omen.

G.C.-So you got taken for how much?

T.L.-I didn't have anything on me, but I was held up at gunpoint, and I thought I was going to die. So I took it as a serious sign. So I decided to go. I decided to take off, and Doug decided to take off. We decided to come back here. I was playing guitar alot by myself, just trying to start anew with the way I play and everything like that and writing alot of songs. And then Pistol came back for a visit and I was playing him some of the songs and he was talking about things in California and where he was at. He decided to move back.

G.C.-So Doug and Jason were out there?

T.L.-No. Doug came back with me. He was planning on going to school and stuff like that. And Jason stayed out there. So J is still out there, and Pistol came back about six months later. And we started fooling around, messing around. And the same thing happened with The Pants as happened with The Chainsaws. We wanted to see what it would be like to play electrically. Try to see what was going on. So we had a gig before we had a band. We started working on the CD and once again attention deficit disorder set in. We said "Let's make a band!", so we did that. We've been working that way ever since. We are really starting to solidify. We're going to start recording our new album in a

couple of weeks. We're going to do it at Andrew from Chin Ho!'. At least the basic tracks there. We're not really sure how it's going to go. We're hopefully going to pop that one right out. Finish it and release it. Quickly.

G.C.-Let me ask you how things were written.

T.L.-You mean The Pants or The Chainsaws?

G.C.-The Chainsaws.

T.L.-The Chainsaws were a mixture. Some of the songs were all done by me, some songs were done by me and J, some things were all done during practice. It was pretty collective.

G.C.-Do you have any favorite songs.

T.L.-Chainsaws songs? Definitely. "Belt", "Never 2 Late 2 Spend", "Benoit" I think is a great song. I like all those songs.

G.C.-Are there any Chainsaws shows that stand out?

T.L.-Our best show, without a doubt, was the Rock and Roll Rumble at The (now defunct) Front. The second night of the Rumble...I don't know how many years ago.

G.C.-You guys took second place.

T.L.-We took second place. We deserved first. We made our second tape, "Shark", after that. That's the best Chainsaws tape.

G.C.-Who won the Rumble that year?

T.L.-Motel Brown. We did all original material. We thought we did a great gig. And they did six out of ten covers. And it was reggae. I don't know. We were upset. But that's alright. That was a long time ago. The Front's gone. I'm still here. You know what I mean?

G.C.-I know what you mean.

T.L.-I've gotten over it.

G.C.-At the time you guys were playing I was very excited by what you were doing.

T.L.-I was very excited by what was going on. I thought we were doing some interesting things.

G.C.-And the impression I got from Doug was that he was very excited about it, too.

T.L.-I think we were all psyched. I don't know. It's nice. We definitely got our niche in the Burlington music history.

G.C.-Yeah, I think you really did.

T.L.-That was fun and that was a large part of why we started. We were so sick of all these bands that we saw we thought, "Wouldn't it be funny to make the ridiculous band we could possibly think of and take over?"

G.C.-It was pretty fun. That was the whole attitude.

T.L.-We always wanted to have a pretty good time. And that was the reason it ended, too. You can only sustain that for so long. You grow as a person and you're dealing with all of these hard things, and you're trying to be this "fun band" and "quirky band" and I just didn't feel like being quirky anymore. I just wasn't into it. So it was hard. And now I've got the Pants.

G.C.-But, as you told me earlier, The Pants are not The Chainsaws Of Babylon Part II.

T.L.-That's exactly right. The Pants are not The Chainsaws Part II. The Pants are an ever evolving musical entity that will, umm... as far as I'm concerned I'm much more mature as far as the way I'm approaching this whole creative endeavor. Expectations et cetera. I know how I write the best. So far they've all been my songs, except for a couple of collaborations. Everyone has to look out for the new album. Everyone has to buy it.

G.C.-We're all really excited about it.

T.L.-I've got a really good feeling about it. It will be in the record stores by March 20th. My birthday.

Sadly, for those who missed The Chainsaws experience, there is little to go on now. No CDs, no more cassettes. Just old war stories that may or may not mean anything to those who were not there. Scenes come and go. But those who were there remember when The Chainsaws Of Babylon took the stage will remember that they used to rule this town. If anyone out there is interested enough and wants to take a listen to this band, call me or harass me at Toast and I will dub some for you (with The Chainsaws permission, of course).

Zach Ward is a member of Burlington's brilliant Guppyboy and has formed a new project called Eef with Mike Barrett, Brad Searles and Jedd Kettler.

The Pyralisk is Montpelier's counter-culture night spot that has become the establishment.

The funky coffee house, art gallery and hangout for just about every kind of central Vermonter, is about to enter its sixth year. Set behind Main Street's City Hall and fire station, taking up the entire first floor of the old post office, the Pyralisk has become a most unexpected success.

Created in 1989 by Montpelier artist Nicholas Hecht, along with pre-school teacher Diane Hulphers and a group of local arts people, the Pyralisk has become the capital city's community arts and entertainment center, offering attractions ranging from punk to rock to bluegrass to avant-garde theater to opera, all the time gracing its walls with local art, fine to funky.

The audiences are just as eclectic as what's on stage. One night will find the likes of Montpelier Mayor Ann Cummings, State Senator William Doyle, or State Secretary of Human Services Con Hogan (an inveterate bluegrass fan as well as performer) seated next to ex-hippies and artists; another night will have teens dancing right next to folks old enough to be their parents. (They are.)

One night a year, the Legislature takes over the Pyralisk to present its own homegrown cabaret (public invited) on, appropriately enough, April 1: April Fools Day.

The Pyralisk, begun as what many thought was an anti establishment statement, has, in fact, become the local establishment...without changing its style a bit. Besides more than cordial relations with the city of Montpelier (the mayor, a crafts person, and her husband, a painter, both have exhibited here,) the Pyralisk has hosted a multitude of civic benefits, including one that raised more than \$2,000 for the Montpelier Flood Relief Fund several years ago.

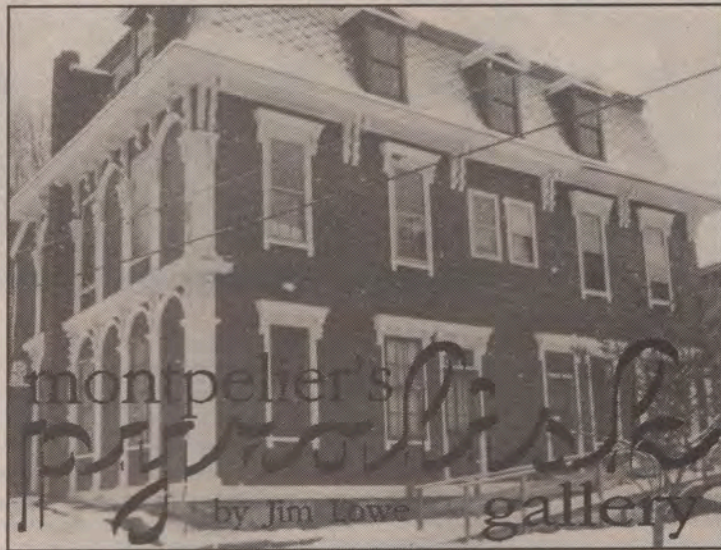
Last year, some 140 concerts attracted over 18,000 patrons. The Pyralisk has been a regular home to the state's burgeoning singer-songwriter movement. Regulars have included Rachel Bissex, Casey and Gagnon, Michael Hurley, Dana Robinson, Nick Thorne (also an internationally acclaimed classical composer,) Brooks Williams and Diane Ziegler, among many.

Some of the state's most accomplished musical groups like Banjo Dan and the Mid-Nite Plowboys, Bob Yellin and the Joint Chiefs of Bluegrass, Cold Country Bluegrass, and the New Bremen Town Musicians, as well as the Vermont Opera Theater, have found enthusiastic audiences at the Pyralisk.

The Pyralisk is also the area's prime source for jazz, having introduced the Jazz Hooligans, No Walls Jazz, the So Called Jazz Sextet, San Francisco's Michael Vlatkovich Jazz Quartet, and more recently, David Kraus' Some Sort of Angel and Jamie Masefield's Mandolinquents.

Saturday night dances usually find the Pyralisk packed to the rafters. State of the art music is provided by a wide variety of the state's most

popular groups-like Chin Hol, D'Moja, Lambsbread, Mr. Dooley, Peg Tasse's new Velvet Ovum Band, Panashe, Slush, Uproot, and Montpelier's sophisticated rock ensemble that began at the Pyralisk, Ken Sleep's Naked Theater has included Burlington's Green Candle



Theater (formerly Garage Theater) and Theater Factory, Warren's Phantom Theater, as well as actors Peter Burns, James Michael Keene, Donny Osman and Dana Yeaton in various guises, as well as James Hogue's "Cabaret Shakespeare." The Pyralisk is used for art, dance and drumming classes. If anyplace offers something for everyone, it's the Pyralisk.

At the heart of the Pyralisk's success is Nicholas Hecht. The image of the painter of the surreal and macabre belies a soft-spoken gentleman who can bring together the most disparate groups. He is a hero to the counter-culture while winning awards for community service from the local establishment. For him, the Pyralisk is his living room, and the visitors are his guests.

All this happens on the barest of shoestring budgets: not much more than \$23,000 a year. (For comparison, the annual budget of central Vermont's other major presenter, the Onion River Arts Council, is about \$200,000.) And about 84 percent of this comes from the gate.

The Pyralisk is not a night club: it charges admission rather than a cover. There is no income from food or alcohol, where most clubs earn their income. There is food but no profit. If you're of age, you can bring in your own alcoholic beverages (except for the alcohol free dances,) but the Pyralisk gets nothing from this.

Out of this, some \$12,000 goes to rent. In winter, heat runs \$300 a month or more, electricity is \$80, and telephone is about \$80, bringing it to \$1,500 a month. But Dan Hecht, the Pyralisk board's president and Nicholas' brother, insists it's more like \$1,750 with incidentals added.

The Pyralisk's entire payroll is \$4,800, paying Nick Hecht less than \$93 a week for a more than full time job.

Normally, performing artists receive 60 percent of

the gate and must put up a meager \$10 promotion fee. However, when there was too small an audience, Nick has been known to turn over the entire door to the artists.

Last January, it almost came to an end when the Pyralisk found itself in serious financial trouble.

The board announced that if they couldn't raise \$5,000 within the month, the Pyralisk would close. Within days of its being announced in the local newspaper, the Times Argus, the deficit was repaid and a minor surplus begun.

Again, this year, finances have been tough, but things are picking up. "We have our giant fundraiser going on now," Hecht explained. "The Vermont Council on the Arts helped us with a grant to put together this big fancy brochure."

These days, rock groups are the big draw, Hecht said, and there are other acts that draw a big card, such as Mark Greenberg's annual Woody Guthrie birthday celebration. "Serious jazz groups, new ones, have been enjoying quite respectable audiences, like Jamie Masefield and David

Kraus. These are musicians who take their work very seriously, and they're drawing people," he said.

"I'd get very worried if the only people that were going to things were adolescents-who like to flock places-but that's not the case," Hecht said.

Surprisingly, the teen dances have caused very few problems at the Pyralisk. "It's been amazingly good, considering you're getting together a very volatile group...amazingly good," Hecht said, adding that the police station is right across the way. Hecht, himself, is looking forward to an experimental theater project that includes a workshop and a new tap dancing group formed by Karen Gerdel. Another workshop with Lost Nation Theater actor Michael Keene is in the works, as well, Hecht said. There are big changes going on around the Pyralisk, he said. First in Fitness, a local health and fitness club, will be building a new center in the parking lot behind city hall and St. Augustine's Catholic Church. A new street will soon run from Main Street to State Street via Harry Sheridan Avenue-right in front of the Pyralisk.

The Pyralisk just received its 501(c)3 status from the Internal Revenue Service, making donations tax deductible. "We were waiting for that to launch any kind of big process to buy the building," Hecht explained.

"We have-and I don't want to name any names-some people who will put up some or all of the down payment at this time.

The Pyralisk offers annual memberships for \$30 (or more if possible,) which includes the monthly calendar by mail. or more information, write or call: The Pyralisk Arts Center, Inc., P.O. Box 1071, Montpelier, VT 05601. (802) 229-2337.

Jim Lowe is arts editor for The Times Argus, in Barre and Montpelier.



Don't Quit Your Day Job

Story and Photography by
Tom Huntington

You've seen them up on stage at the local clubs, illuminated under the lights, expressing themselves through microphones, guitars, amplifiers and drum kits. But when the lights aren't shining, many of our beloved local musicians (as well as many other young folks, in general) can be found at various locations around town making lattes, ringing up CD's, serving food and drinks, or doing just about anything else in order to survive in a city that's economy is almost entirely service related - and still have some freedom to pursue their musical aspirations as well.

Just take a walk down Church Street on any given day, stop into some of the shops and you are sure to find some; sometimes, you may even find as many as three in one place. "If all the musicians in town just disappeared, there would be no service industry in Burlington" quipped Tom Baggot, who, besides being a grad student at UVM, can most often be found working at Java Blues, a "blues coffee house" on College Street, or playing percussion and harmonica with the Channel Two Dub Band, among other things.

We were not at Java Blues, however, but at yet another coffee shop where I had come to talk to Wide Wail-ers David Rosenstein and Kieran Donaghey, who have been serving up the fresh roast at Uncommon Grounds on upper Church Street since graduating from UVM last summer. Asked if it was hard to balance work and the band, both agreed that they had it pretty good due to the kindness of the owners, who also happen to be parents of an aspiring musician. "They understand," said Dave, "and they're very supportive," allowing them to take days off together in order to rehearse or when they play out.

Also stopping by the roundtable was Melanie Nunnick of Envy, who just happened to be hanging out there, as were several other local musicians (its quite the local hang). A 'jane-of-all-trades,' Melanie not only works at Crabtree & Evelyn in Winooski part-time but also does a variety of other things as well, such as cleaning houses, working a jewelry cart on Church Street, doing errands for some older women friends and even painting houses.

"I do everything, whatever comes along. I can do whatever you want," she said with a laugh. "I basically don't really have one job and none of them are very firm. They're always temporary positions."

Like many of the other musicians I talked to, Melanie

admitted that it was sometimes difficult to make ends meet and still be able to focus on music. "With or without music, that's always an issue," she said, but quickly added that music provides her with a sense of salvation that makes it easier to deal with some of the hardships, a sentiment that was shared with many of the people that I talked to. "Having the aspect of music in my life makes it so much easier to have these idiot jobs and feel like I'm not a total moron, 'cause I have something besides that," she explained.

"Frustrating," is how drummer Brad Searies described trying to balance music and work, although his job at Tones Records on lower Church Street - where he works about 30 hours a week - is somewhat of a dream come true for him. Brad, who also writes for the Burlington Free Press (where he was recently employed in the customer service department) and does some other freelance writing, is also running two record labels - Split Records and Club Fub - and is currently in two bands - eef and hover.

"I mean, there's no way to make a living at it," he continued, "so you have to just do these things to sustain yourself, and that eats up all the creative time to do the other stuff. Its self-defeating and you end up being tired and trying to make room, and the other things in your life suffer when you're trying to squeeze in all that stuff."

Record stores are an obvious place to expect to find some musicians, and around the corner at Pure Pop Records, you can usually find three of the most rockin' guitar players in Burlington in the form of Matt Hutton of Eavy, Paul "Pistol" Jaffe of The Pants, and Eugene Nicolaev of The Fags.

Since graduating from UVM last May (Phi Beta Kappa, no less), Matt has worked at the Burlington Bagel Bakery (at the time, there were about five other musicians working there as well, including hover vocalist Jan Tofferi, who now works next door at the Burlington Flower Market) and on-and-off at Macro International (doing phone surveys - another hotbed of local musicians, including Marc Daniels and Richard Bailey of Dysfunkshun) before starting at Pure Pop a few months ago, which is obviously his favorite of the three for several reasons.

"Here, you get to listen to music and stuff," he explained. "You get to see first hand what the business is - which is selling music - and to plug your own stuff. Also, "it forces us to hang out together," he added, "so it sort of helps out the scene."

Pistol, who grew up in Burlington and graduated from UVM in '91, has been working there since returning from San Francisco a year and a half ago, where he was making about three times as much money, so he wasn't quite as

enthusiastic. "I guess its as enjoyable as a job can be. Of course, I don't have enough money [so] I can't go anywhere." Still, he said that he was glad to be back in the Burlington music scene. "Its just a much better atmosphere" here, he said.

For Eugene, who has been working there since last August, Pure Pop is the "first consistent job" he's had in the last three years. Arriving in Burlington from the Ukraine about four and a half years ago with his family, he has been "unemployed for the majority of the last three years," he said. "I was living off my record collection ... the majority of the Reggae stuff."

Although most of the people I talked to have day jobs, thereby allowing them to play out at night or go check out the music scene, there are a few musicians who can be found working nights at some of the local restaurants. One of the more well-known such people is Rina Bijou guitarist Max Owre, a bartender at Five Spice Cafe (Church Street bottom block), who started as a waiter there two and a half years ago.

"Waiting tables is a night job, so its hard to do the music and wait tables," said Max, who grew up in St. Johnsbury and went to UVM, "but bartending, I'm able to cut down on the number of shifts I do," thereby freeing him up to "work on my own stuff," which includes writing material for Rina Bijou and also for a novel that he's working on. "Being a bartender is a great way to spread the word," added Max. "Its a public contact job. You get a lot of free time and the hours are very flexible."

And if you venture to Peking Duck House in Winooski, you may just find cartoonist and local Superstar James Kochalka, who has been known to grace the musical stage now and again ("I'm the least hard-workin' musician in town," he joked). James, who hails from Springfield, Vermont and graduated from UVM in '89, has been a waiter there for two years now and says that "being a waiter is really hard work," but added that "its a good job because the money's pretty good and I don't have to work full-time" and because Peking Duck House closes pretty early, so he can still go out and see music.

In general, most of the people I talked to felt that as long as they had some flexibility in their schedule to pursue their music, workin' for "the man" wasn't so bad. One of the most common things I heard? "Of course, if I had a choice, I'd rather not work at all." Ahhh ... maybe in a perfect world.

Tom Huntington is the editor of the Vermont Collegian, a bi-weekly statewide college newspaper.

sound tech.

THE SOUND ENGINEER Series SERGEI C. USHAKOV

Originally from Burlington's Sister City of Yaroslavl, Russia, Sergei Ushakov is not your ordinary sound engineer. He began his career as a musician at the age of 12. A very versatile young man, Sergei learned to play many instruments.

"I played guitar in the Young Pioneers," which he describes as the Russian version of the Boys Scouts of America.

"When my voice changed, I taught myself to play the drums by banging on the pillows and furniture."

From age 15, Ushakov started playing drums in a band, where they "played popular titles by the Beatles, CCR, Deep Purple, Grand

Funk and the like." Then from 1977 to 1979 he played the trumpet in the Soviet Army.

"Very often we performed the funeral ceremony," he remembers, smiling. "This involved marching up the mountain to the cemetery in 95 degree temperatures. We'd be dripping wet by the time we reached the top."

This didn't stop him. He continued to play drums until 1983, when his interest shifted to the "fine art of mixing sound for various local groups and learning the very important technical aspects of my profession."

In 1989 he landed his "first serious job as House Sound Engineer with the Yaroslavl Philharmonic."

Due to the economic conditions in Russia, this position required Ushakov have an extensive knowledge of how to piece things together from scrap parts of older equipment. Newly manufactured parts weren't being made or were too expensive to purchase.

"I did this until 1991 when I started working with an independent sound company," he says. "For the next three years we serviced the most popular and famous musicians in Russia. We did stadium and big concert hall

shows in central Russia."

While moonlighting as an independent sound engineer at the Yaroslavl Jazz Club, he met musicians from all around the world, including Big Joe Burrell with The Unknown Blues Band and Science Fixton, all from Vermont. As a result of these connections and his dedicated, hard work, Ushakov was invited to travel to the Discover Jazz Festival in Burlington in 1992 with the Russian group Tangiezer, where he met the woman who would later become his wife.

After eleven years of hard work "under (his) belt," he has now begun his own sound engineering business/career "from scratch" in Vermont. He can often be seen at the board at Club Metronome and other venues around town.

"Only this time," Ushakov emphasizes, "I have the advantage of living in a capitalistic society, and the ambition to complete a dream."

Each issue goodCITIZEN will feature a Vermont sound engineer. A sound engineer can be the most important friend a musician ever makes..we'll get to know our sound VIP's.



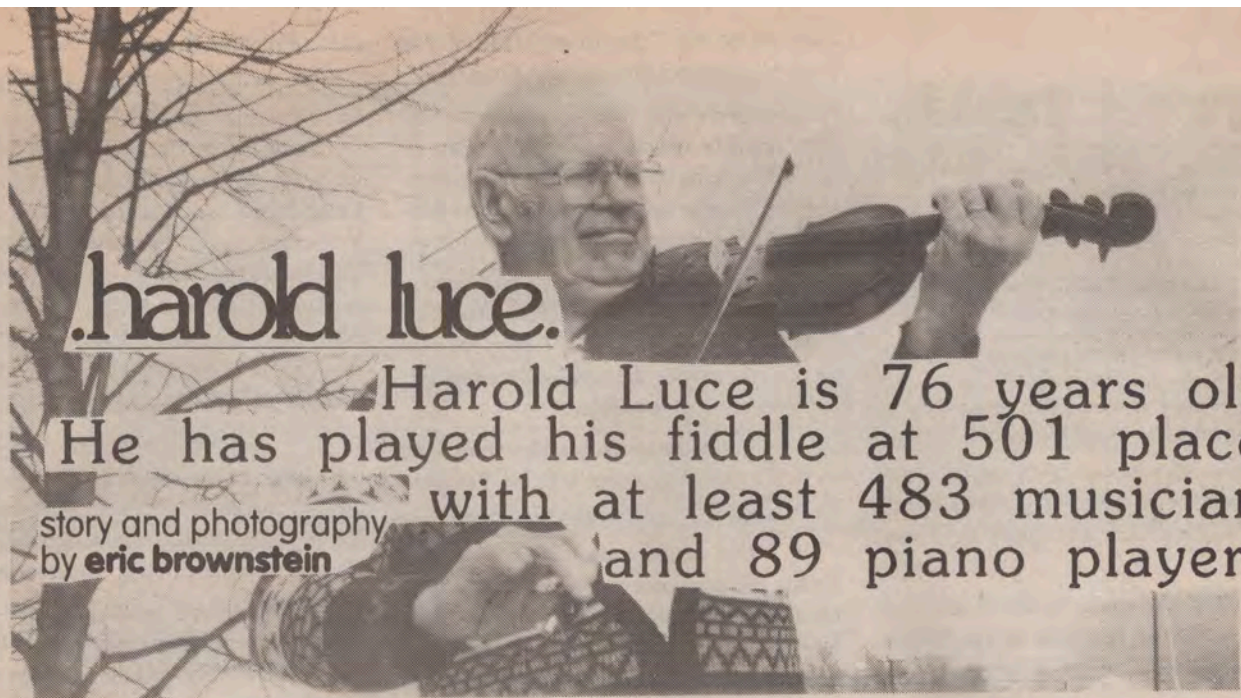
(Roger Lewis, Guitarist for..."?")

STARRY NIGHT Photography

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.harold luce.

Harold Luce is 76 years old. He has played his fiddle at 501 places with at least 483 musicians and 89 piano players.

story and photography by **eric brownstein**

"Mr. Harold Luce?"
"Yes?" he drawled.
"My name is Eric Brownstein and I'm calling from Good Citizen magazine..."
"Sorry. Not interested." Abrupt, but polite.
"No.No.No.No.No.Wait. I want to write a story about you!"
"Oh...well, alright then."

Harold told me that he was performing tomorrow and that I should come and have dinner with him at 12 noon at the Lebanon Senior Center. He said that he'd be playing with a few other guys for an hour. So, I set out along scenic 89, camera and recorder ready, to meet the 76 year old legend himself: Harold Luce, Vermont fiddler.

Feeling privileged to step back in time and hear old Vermont, I joined the folks at the Lebanon Senior Center to hear Harold Luce and the volunteer band. Arriving moments before the Friday liver and onion special, I maneuvered around the diners and found the band's table. There was 73 year old John Race, the rhythm guitar man. Youngster Paul "Golden Voice" Roi, at 67, on the piano. And at a cool 87, L.L. "Chub" Benjamin on the sax and banjo. (Showing his self-discipline, Chub wouldn't eat the meal or the lemon pudding for fear of shooting it through the horn.) Amongst handshakes and introductions, they told me some history about the band and Harold was far too humble to mention all of his achievements. The other guys tried to tell me as much as they could about Harold before he arrived, but when I finally talked to Mr. Luce, I heard nothing but his desire to express his love for his music and the joy that he gets from playing for people.

As dinner finished, I took my spot close to the music. A few people stood up and started doing that dance that I can never pull off: real easy...a smooth steppin' partner shuffle to a softly rolling beat. The mood of the place lightened and the fluorescent lights seemed to stop humming. Some of the ladies, I could see, added the lyrics to "Let Me Call You Sweetheart" as the instruments played. For many of the listeners, the dance had moved inside: a seated woman told me that she danced with her cane, while

others let their orchestrating arms express what I saw in their eyes.

As I hovered around, taking pictures, I decided that I had to slow down and enjoy the scene. I found willing dance partners in Ida, Maxine and Shirley. When I tried to explain that in my twenty-four years I had never learned to polka, Ida (or was it Maxine?) nodded understandingly and assumed that I must enjoy "...younger stuff like the jitterbug."

The music flowed with a mixture of polkas, waltzes, jigs, and country western music. As Chub continuously switched from banjo to sax and back again, the music formed an eerie mix of big band and old time fiddling music. Harold's fiddling lent the music it's backbone; he was subtle, but his years and years of experience sounded smoothly and clearly through the melodies. There was no sheet music and no set list and they stepped from one song to the next with an assurance that comes only with time. The instruments themselves were well worn. Through the burnished metal of the sax and the mellow wear of the fiddle's wood, I could feel the tradition as the music hit my body. You wouldn't call the senior center a glamorous place to see a concert, but they played live music for folks who grew up with live music.

"I play the way people are," said Harold. At the senior center, Harold and the boys played it slow so that the fans could savor it and move at the pace that they liked. When I spoke with him after the jam, I couldn't get much from him about his accomplishments. I found out that he had won the 1940 NY World's Fair Fiddler Competition. I learned that he invented and constructed a foot-operated piano-playing machine by which he could play chords as he played the fiddle and called a square dance at the same time. In fact, he plays so well that he can have a conversation at his most furious fiddling.

Harold hasn't stopped playing since he started playing at age of eleven. Now, at seventy-six, he still plays three to four times each week: calling square (quadrille, I learned,) contra dances and round dances with his dancing band Hartt Hollow. He plays parties and volunteers for senior citizen and handicapped groups. He's performed everywhere: from churches to "beer pits," from funerals to weddings.

He has played at more than 503 different places, with at least 483 musicians and 89 piano players. The last piano player had lost his sight, another guy had passed away and that's how this latest group of volunteer musicians came together.

His wife Edith told me that he had chosen to become a fiddler as opposed to a violinist because, as Harold said "I wanted to play something that people could tap their feet to." His wife told me that Harold's fiddle talks and when I listened closely, I could hear a fiddler as opposed to a violinist because, as Harold said "I wanted to play something that people could tap their feet to." His wife told me that Harold's fiddle talks and when I listened closely, I could hear a kitchen junket story where the characters were friends and family dancing together. In medieval France, feasts called junkets were very often musical events and this tradition moved to rural Vermont and became kitchen junkets. The host would clear out the furniture from the largest room of the house, usually the kitchen, and the party would get moving.

He became most enthusiastic when he talked about playing a party and getting people dancing. "If they pay me to make 'em dance, I'm gonna make 'em dance!" He plays for teens, colleges and seniors and his wife told me that "when he starts, it's like they come right out of the wood work!" Harold stressed over and over that it is "no problem" to learn and that he can have any group dancing in minutes, as he adjusts his instructions to the level of experience that the dancers have. I saw him perform with his mellow quartet, but his band members told me that it's when the dancing gets started that his real skills come out. "Clear out the furniture," his fiddle seems to say, "it's time to dance."

Harold Luce leads dancing on the third Saturday of every month at the Royalton Academy in Royalton, Vermont. He'll be happy to tell you his schedule if you give him a holler, but please don't call too late...he may be resting up for the next junket.

Harold Luce and his band Hartt Hollow have a CD out on the Record Company of Vermont label. He can be reached at RR Box 62, Chelsea, VT 05038. 802-685-4809.

Eric Brownstein is a free-lance writer who has recently moved to Vermont.

Anne Weiss will probably never be a star. With good reason, too—she doesn't really want to be one. "I never had that 'star drive,'" she says. In terms of fame, Anne has known people on their way up as well as on their way down and neither looks too appealing to her. Besides, fame-seeking is antithetical to the way she sees making music. Weiss would rather make music out of a "desire to be inclusive" and, as someone with strong feelings and beliefs, she feels she has to "or else I would pop."

This being said, during her time in Vermont she's become something of a local legend for her immense bluesy voice and striking original songs. For nearly ten years now, she's been attracting a devoted audience who grow in numbers slowly but steadily. In fact, she recorded her first tape almost reluctantly because people had been pestering her for so long to do it. It had reached the point where people were stopping her on the street, asking her if she'd recorded yet. The tape, *Tomorrow's Gate*, represents her biggest venture so far into anything resembling a 'career move', something she resisted for a long time feeling that people only made tapes to "start them in the machine" of the music business. With the prodding of her friends though, she came to see a tape, like any other creative endeavor, as a way she could share music with people.

Anne's attitudes toward music stem from her childhood on the west side of Manhattan. She speaks fondly of her grandmother, Elizabeth Weiss, a concert pianist who eked out a meager living giving lessons but managed to be "the most loving and patient person" Anne has known. Unable to read written music due to visual impairment at a young age, Anne learned from her grandmother by ear, developing a valuable ability to pick up music quickly.

She also cites as a major influence the Hey Brother, Hey Sister Coffeehouse she frequented in her early teens. Founded amidst the social justice movements of the sixties and the era's 'folk revival', Hey Brother, Hey Sister attracted those with a love of music as well as those with a love of justice. It was these people that instilled in Weiss that desire to be inclusive, playing music not for performance's sake but more to make a "creative happening where people go away feeling not separate but somehow more connected."

Music was all over Anne's neighborhood, between the coffeehouses and the classical music, Latino and disco music on the radio, and Afro-Cuban drumming in the park. People didn't take their music lightly either. Once as Anne was walking down the street, a group of old men hanging out on the corner got up and blocked her way. Word had gotten around that she was learning to play blues guitar and they wanted her to play for them. Someone pulled out an old guitar that looked like it "had been used as a canoe paddle" and, handing it to her, a great time ensued.

Being stopped on the street, given instruments, and the blues all seem to be a part of Anne Weiss' karma. She claims she's never actually bought an instrument but seems to have them given to her "on a regular basis", down to the not-too-shabby Yamaha she plays today. As for the blues, Weiss clearly remembers hearing blues piano on the radio for the first time and knowing "that was it". But a piano is not a travelling instrument and, setting off hitchhiking at 16, Anne became primarily a guitar player.

She spent the following years travelling, playing music, spending a year here and there in college, eventually ending up graduating from Goddard and setting up shop in East Montpelier. During this time she also wrote songs, developing a distinctly personal voice that seems to come from her core. Songs written empathically, soulful and humorous, almost embarrassingly tender and careful, yet unequivocally strong. It is these songs that endear her to the people who faithfully turn out to see her.

Anne Weiss' music reflects a philosophy that demands hope against hard times. In "Walk Down the Road", a song not on the tape, she asks *will you sit at home with your tears and moan or will you walk down the road with me?* This choice is reflected in many of her songs. *If today were your last*

columns

day, she asks in the song "Secret", would you hoard your love or would you give it away? Again and again there is the struggle between day-to-day survival and the necessity of joy. For Weiss, everyday requires resistance as well as celebration: some of us are hungry, some of us live in pain but every day we work for change! is a good day just the same! and we make each day! a day of celebration...

Weiss' songs are undiluted; she's not long-winded or wordy. Her words don't have poetic craftiness, but rather work from earnestness. Like a true folksinger, you get the feeling she could sing the goodness out of the simplest set of words.

Perhaps her songs are so striking with such little craft because she works out of a necessity to write rather than a drive to be prolific. Weiss doesn't have the pedal to the metal in terms of producing work.

While many singer-songwriters boast reams of original material Weiss will write when "possessed by the muses...when they demand that something come out of me." She admits though, that it is "scary when the muses shut up for a while."

Like the composer Charlie Haden or the poet Amiri Baraka, Anne Weiss sees her music as one facet of her life's mission to help create justice in the world. She's not only spent time on the road as a musician but also as a political activist. Between 1986 and 1990 Weiss used East Montpelier as a home base while travelling widely, involved in radical organizing and education. These years found her on peace walks from Vermont to Washington D.C., twice in Central America and a couple of times in jail.

Although admired by and often grouped with singer-songwriters, Weiss comes more out of a folksinger tradition. Her live performances are casual, almost to a fault. She rambles, jokes, copiously tunes, occasionally forgets bits of songs. If not everyone in the room is groovy, it can be a little unsettling. Her risk taking, which often involves calling friends up on stage to sit in, can, however, create moments no strictly solo performer could ever touch. Spontaneous cho-

uses are formed, extra solo breaks are added. It serves to Anne's credit that she's often more comfortable than her audience.

The best of these arrangements are captured on *Tomorrow's Gate*, recorded live to DAT at Burlington's Low Tech Studio. With an impressive roster of local musicians as well as California's Keith Greenaway and Northampton's Dar Williams, *Tomorrow's Gate* features a refreshingly live acoustic sound, wisely emphasizing musical chemistry rather than overproduction. The voices are led by Weiss' own, a voice that testifies to the sincerity of each song. Four of the eleven songs on the tape feature her alone, or with sparse accompaniment.

Released this summer to a packed Last Elm Café, there was plenty of jamming and harmonizing to be had. Many showed up with instruments. The night celebrated, more than Weiss' renown, what a great night of music and collaboration can be like. It doesn't happen often though, as Weiss doesn't shop herself around or actively pursue gigs. In many's eyes this may not 'do her justice', but one gets the feeling that Weiss is seeking justice of another kind.

In other news...

•Deaths and births: The Mandolinquents and Hickory Switch recently met their end, and will be sorely missed by many. First Night saw the birth of The Last Elm String Band

(soon to rename and reappear) featuring members of Wild Branch, Hickory Switch, the VSO, and Famous Potato.

•Recent local releases include Dana Robinson, Breakaway, and Nightingale...

•Local scenes to watch: City Market open mike on Wednesdays, Bluegrass at Sneakers on Wednesdays, Traditional sessions at the Last Elm on Tuesdays, the Dockside on Wednesdays, VT Pub and Brewery on the 1st Thursday of the month. The ever-expanding Gordon Stone "Trio" plays Parima (in the old Deja Vu) Sundays at 7:30.

•Contra dances at Edmunds School in Burlington the 4th Saturday of every month by Queen City Contras...

•February at the Dally Bread in Richmond: 2/2 Mark Lavoie, 2/9 Doug Perkins, 2/16

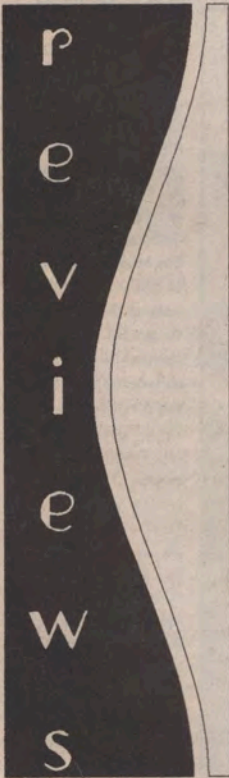
David Gusakov, 2/23 unspecified poetic endeavor...



photo by Jeff Miller

Neil Cleary is an 800 year old poet/singer of shanty songs and in his spare time hosts WRUV's "The Folkin' Idiot" radio program and plays drums for the Pants and Famous Potato.

the folkin' idiot by Neil Cleary



Hover
"Almost Everything"
Dewdrops/Club Fub Records
1817 Corinth Ave, #10
Los Angeles, CA 90025
Released in 1995

by Matthew Taylor

Hover's 16 song CD entitled, *Almost Everything*, was released in January on Dewdrops records, a Los Angeles based label. The album, which is entirely a compilation of previously released Hover material, brings together the band's work of the last three years and packages it very professionally under one title. The first three songs originally appeared as *My Tea Is Gone*, a 1993 ClubFub release. These songs and the fourth were all recorded masterfully at Low-Tech Studios on Burlington. The sound quality of these four songs (and really the rest of the album) is of extraordinarily high standards. Accomplishing what many local bands are still grappling with, Hover has found a good mix in the studio and the result is a full, well-rounded sound.

The band, which combines the ethereal, lulling vocals of Jan Tofferi with the guitar work of Bob Higgins, bass and vocals of Nick Nichols, and drumming of Brad Searles, manages to capture a dreamy, late-80's-esque sensitive, sharp-edged pop sound quite effectively. They have found the formula for the listener-friendly, accessible pop song and they stick by this formula steadily throughout the 16 tracks.

The positive side of Hover's sound is that they write catchy songs and compose them skillfully, maintaining a good balance between the melodic and the slightly more hard-edged. The only perceived problem might be that the songs on *Almost Everything* fit this form so well that they seem to run together. While all three instrument-wielding members are accomplished musicians with a good feel for what they play, only Higgin's guitar is noticeably varied from song to song. Although the bass and drums are integral elements of the mix and very effective in creating the sound that Hover successfully strives for, they rarely change from one song to another and become predictable by the end of the album.

This is not necessarily a bad thing. Tofferi's vocals, which seem to be intentionally void of emotion, are also very predictable. She delivers thoughtful lyrics in a smooth and sedated manner which seem to want to break free from their confinement, but never do. As with the rhythm section, Tofferi rarely strays from her quiet, understated, sleepy style. This is not a criticism, as it appears to be precisely what Hover is trying to accomplish throughout the album. It should be noted that they are very good at what they do; they are very good at a particular type of music. I just can't help but feel that they could be a great band if they mixed things up a bit and worked on developing the personality of individual songs now that they've developed a strong sense of themselves as a band.

One of the album's highlights is "North Hyde Park", a song written by the sometimes Burlington band, Guppyboy. This track, recorded at ClubFub in the summer of 1993, originally appeared on *GuppyLove-A Tribute To Guppyboy*. Songs 6 through 16 were originally released on cassette as *thinsilverhorizon*, recorded in 1993 at ClubFub and Wilde studios. Higgin's guitar gets a little more abrasive on some of these tracks, and Nichols adds some vocal work, which mixes very smoothly at times with Tofferi's singing. One of Hover's strong points are these vocal harmonies which, though sparse, mix well with the mood of the music. This is something I would have liked to see them employ more often as it tends to add depth to the vocals.

Almost Everything is a success and should be seen as such. Hover is on the right track and, with a little more variation and perseverance, would have every opportunity to evolve into a great band, if they wished to. They have the mold and they have the technique. They do what they do extremely well and should be rewarded for it. With a little bit more energy and song to song originality, Hover would be a band to watch out for. As it stands however, they are, for the most part, defunct. *Almost Everything* is an important anthology for these Burlington musicians and is definitely worth your money. Check it out and see for yourself because you may never actually get to see Hover.

*Matthew Taylor is a local coffee jerk who spends his spare time sleeping, eating,
and wondering why the Flock of Seagulls never had another hit.*

Erich Kory
"Sentient Cello"
Cello Vision, PO Box 135,
Vergennes, VT 05401
Producer: Erich Kory
Recorded at Treehouse Studio,
Charlotte, and Low Tech Studio,
Burlington, VT.
Released in 1993.

by C. Graves

"Sentient" refers to awareness, and "Sentient Cello," once again, makes one aware of the variety of talent residing in Vermont, away from the mainstream music establishment. Cellist Erich Kory has worked with such diverse talents as Sting and Leonard Bernstein, and created musical themes for performance artists and dance ensembles in New York, Germany and Montreal. And then there is this compact disc, originating in Vergennes, Vermont.

From the technical standpoint alone, there are engineers at London/Decca productions that could learn a lot from the lush sound produced by Treehouse Studios and Charles Eller Studio, both located in Charlotte. According to the jacket, Kory composed, engineered, mixed, and edited the whole recording, so he deserves the highest credit for electronic as well as cellistic skill...and the cello technique is spectacular. All the music and sounds, including thunder and birdcalls, are produced by cello.

Upon first listening, the virtuosity of Kory's playing literally took my breath away; he produces sounds from the cello that draw from various traditions and themes, from Bach's solo cello partita bowings to classical Japanese koto pluckings to Segovia-style strums to Arabic half and quarter tone slides (and more!) There are echoes of composers in the classical tradition like Samuel Barber and John Tavener, entwined with rock (I'm reminded of sections in Joe Satriani's "The Extremist"), jazz (Charles Mingus, perhaps) and new age (definitely Paul Winter.)

After noting all the branches of Kory's musical family tree, however, you will probably have to look for this CD in the "New age" section of your local record store. Whether or not you will enjoy it depends, at least in part, on how much you enjoy such composers as the aforementioned Paul Winter or Andreas Vollenweider (harp, "Down to the Moon") and David Lanz (piano, "Christophori's Dream.")

Upon several listenings, the varieties of Kory's technique give way to a certain sameness, or unity if you prefer, of sound, that does not (for me) lend itself to the kind of sitting and only listening experience that, say, John Tavener's "The Protecting Veil" (also for cello) provides. Perhaps Mr. Kory, as clever and tuneful as his works are, has done most of the work for the listener; there is little here to challenge the ear. And yet...while there is a time for challenge, there is also a time for letting go, time to allow others to do things for you. With Mr. Kory, you are in very capable hands. Relax.

C. Graves is a Burlington artist who has experience with folk, rock, and classical music in Vermont, New York and Pennsylvania.

Madelines
"Used to Believe" ep
Sudden Shame Records
2 Cypress Lane
Essex Jct, Vermont
Released 1994

by Alan Rench

Recorded by Joe Egan, Brad Searles and the Madelines at Eclipse Studio in South Burlington, "Used to Believe" is as solid a local recording as you'll find: thick clouds of sound that envelope and caress you and then roll you out into the sky to your certain death. One of those heady, dream time experiences awaits you in a kind of stoned, ethereal haze: imagine a big wash of guitars and a vocal that almost drowns but somehow struggles to the surface.

This is not the land of the screaming solo and the banshee cries of modern rock: this is the land of catchy pop songs that don't jump up and splash down in your face...you kind of have to wade in and get wet. You should actually soak in Madelines music. And take your time.

"Halo," the cassette's opener, is a hook-driven slice of indie pop pie that's so good I'd almost be scared to release it: this is the kind of song that you spend your career trying to top. Well produced, well played and nicely written by Colin, Pat, Kurt and Scott.

Alan Rench loves music and he lives to tell about it.

Various Artists
Sounds Around Burlington
Club Fub Records
PO Box 1452 Burlington VT 05402
Released in 1994

by Becca Foster

"Hello Burlington" hollers James Kochalka Superstar! And so starts the compilation of lo-fi recordings known as "Sounds Around Burlington." Put together by Brad Searles as home recordings intended for a "friends only" kind of release, Brad found a lot of interest in the project and got sponsors and made a CD! Here it is, song by song:

AESOP: It's crazy people...no, it's hopping up and down fun, people...no, it's Aesop! They're playing "Goldfish" at St. Mikes, recorded live and put on this CD. This song definitely gets my attention and even though it's in alphabetical order, this is a great song to start the album.

CHIN HO!: First things first, who's this Sarah? Is she my ex-best friend and if so why didn't you tell me earlier? This song "Stay Away From Sarah" is just one of their many remarkable tunes. It's just Dave and Andrew doing this song but there are more people in the band. of course.

CLEARY, HEBERT & LILJA: Jazzy, jazzy song. A song that both my mother and I can enjoy dancing to around the house.

EEF: Fast and fun tune: Jeddie, Brad and Mike getting into the groove on "Maleman." Let's just hope that Jeddie didn't hurt himself kicking his amp.

THE FAGS: They rock! "Get Away" is awesome to listen to. I can listen to it over and over again!

HICKORY SWITCH: This song reminds me of

doing folk dancing in gym. I loved every minute of it! We had to dance with the boys. Unfortunately I was always the last to be asked. I guess I wasn't popular enough.

HOVER: There's something about this song I just can't place: it has to do with Jan's beautiful voice. My mom the Chin Ho! freak told me that Chin Ho! plays this song a lot. I remember that Jan told me that this song was written by Jeddie...isn't that cool. You remember Jedd, the Eefalicious guy?

HUFFY: It's so funny, this song is so cute. It's like when you were in sixth grade with a new boyfriend and you're both speechless.

MATT HUTTON: I have this dream that when I turn sixteen I'm going to get a car and kidnap my best friend and we're going to leave this great state of Vermont. I don't know why, but this song makes me think about the two of us driving down the freeway with the wind in our hair.

JAZZIN' HELL: I really want to see these guys play. This is like a pre-school learning song but it's about a telephone.

DAVID KAMM: I get all teary eyed with this song "I Hold You," it's crazy! It's one of those songs that makes you want to curl up in bed with your stuffed dog that your brother gave you and the tie dyed t-shirt that you stole from that guy that smells so good.

JEDD KETTLER: Jeddie played this instruments that he brought back from China. Pretty interesting sound but very beautiful.

MADELINES: I love watching these guys rock out. Madelines are like spinning around until you get sick but loving every single minute of it. And you know that you can stay up longer than your friends.

THE PANTS: I've heard a lot about the Pants but this is the first time I've listened to them. This song is like the sun is shining and you're hanging out with a bunch of frogs jumping around and there's some weird bird singing.

SAP: It's really funny I never thought to read the inside of the package while I was listening to the CD. And when it got to this song it was so confusing because it sounded so much like something that Colin would write and sing but I thought that I would have been told by Colin about this SAP. But I guess not. I was so proud of myself to open the package and read that it was Colin!

SKY TEN W/ THE WARDS: "Weapon Factory" sounds like people making weapons in a weapon factory and they are really mad...but who knows?

SNOWPLOW: On February 11, 1994, I went to see Hover play and Snowplow played first and they were really good. So, after that I went to most of their gigs and I got to know their music.

TEARMOS: I've heard this song played by Eef. I guess it's all right if a person plays the same song in a different band. I can relate to this song: I get the same way...I can't get off the couch when I watch too much TV. Thank God we got rid of it.

SEAN TOOHEY: This song reminds me of my school last year. For some reason, this song really brings back memories.

VELVET OVUM BAND: I have a beautiful Velvet Ovum bumper sticker on my bass guitar case. Some stranger gave it to me at the Big Music Fest when I walked by him. This song is really beautiful, just like their bumper sticker.

Becca Foster is thirteen years old and lives in Burlington, Vermont. Her brother is Jedd Kettler of Eef and Tearmos and latter day Hover fame, which may account for her unusually hip, and knowledgeable insight.

FreeFall
 "Primal Youth"
 FreeFall Productions
 214 Battery Street
 Burlington, VT.
 Recorded at
 Archer Studios
 Essex Junction, VT
 Released in 1994

by Stacey Starkweather

Followers of Freefall fusion-jazz extravaganzas will undoubtedly sense a certain kind of pride in being able to finally hold the "Primal Youth" CD in-hand.

The quality and strength of character attained by Steve Blair and Andy Hildebrandt's production with Dan Archer Studios, as well as the mastering by Chas Eller, puts this album into my "best band" category.

Blair and Hildebrandt's thought-provoking songs repeatedly demonstrate their skill as composers.

Certainly, well worth the wait.

Though weighted a little heavy on the fusion styled backbeat, every song is fully formed, crafted to perfection and executed with real excitement.

Conceptions' symphonic, haunting, long-form melody, and *Far Off and In Between's* lilting glide and pensive figures are further proof of this team's high-calabar, compositional ability.

As for the playing itself, all through this release, FreeFall exhibits world-class musicianship.

Guitarist, Steve Blair, with his Strat and fat-body Gibson, weaves each track with tapestries of six-string magic. His explosive bursts of passion during *Conception* present the listener with not only an intriguing strength and compassion for his instrument, but also serve as a philosophical wake-up call.

How far into the stratosphere can one take their instrument?

Chris Peterman, tenor saxophone, clearly and increasingly articulates his own voice as the project progresses. Playing - which may initially strike one as minutely derivative of other players - evolves based on his own conceptions of sound... angular, obtuse and caressing; sometimes intense but never boring.

Bassist Eric Hoh, uses every note he plays. No excess fat, no unnecessary calories; 100% snapping, sweaty, groove-approved soul.

Roger Berard on drums let's you know - whether swinging or popping - the two and four just listen.

Mind boggling piano solos from Andy Hildebrandt dance on the keys with deep beds to die for and a palette of musical intrigue, which don't sound anything like your favorite synths' presets. Definitely, a

leading candidate in the "touched-by-the-hand-of-God" inspiration category.

The word on the street is: Blair and Hildebrandt never stop writing and exploring the unlimited musical material somehow channeled into their universe. Such being the case, it's also been heard - they have enough material to complete two to three more projects. I'll be looking for the next CD.

If you've never chosen to explore original fusion material, my advise is take an adventure with FreeFall. Even if you're not generally into contemporary, fusion or mainstream jazz "Primal Youth" is worth checking out.

Remember these guys live in Vermont. But, how long will our luck last? Thanks to Nectar, we can still get on their trip for the price of a draft or less. But, before this all ceases to be....go-see them.

Starkweather is a bassist for six bands: Disciples, Michael Ray & the Cosmic Krewe, Bad Hat, The Grippo, Sklar Sextet, Jamie Mansfield's Jazz Mandolin Project and the Gordon Stone Trio.

Lester's Butt
 "Rock Titty"
 Burlington CD Project
 P.O. Box 559 Richmond VT 05477
 Released in 1994

by Chaz Handel

Loose and from the heart, Lester's Butt was a band that seemed synonymous with the Last Elm Cafe for a while in 1994. Long on posters, short on appearances, I thought we'd seen the last of the Butt when this song came out of nowhere as if a missive from garage bands past: politically correct and socially relevant, "Rock Titty" is a homo-love song beautifully rendered by bassist/vocalist Diane Rodgers. One moment a hilarious story about cold-hardened nipples and the next a lament that "...it's tough to be a queer when your mom has homo fears..." the song features standard low-fi production values and an irreverence that serves the final purpose just fine; this is a low maintenance story about girl-girl love that manages the difficult task of smiling and looking sad at the same time. In the face of discrimination from stupid people with stupid, outdated ideas, this mere expression of homosexual love seems refreshingly candid. I only wish it could happen more often. Oh, if only people weren't stupid.

Chaz Handel is a writer and contortionist based in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont.

Phish
 "Hoist"
 Elektra Records
 Produced by Paul Fox
 Released in 1994

by Nate Brown

And in the year 1993 Phish went Hollywood. In a big, bad and beautiful way, our hometown heroes took the big bucks of corporate rock, stuffed their pockets, and ran gleefully off into the west coast sun. And as happens in the Land of the Phish (as Nectar would say,) they get away with the crime, no questions asked.

First things first: producer Paul Fox seemed an unlikely choice, considering what role a hired hit man might have in the land of the WEA elves, his name on a Sugarcubes album, among others. What would happen to our lovably quirky pals with a big name, big money shaper of stars at the board? Well, trust the judgement of the Phish (as Nectar would say,) nothing wrong with a hit single, is there? And that seemed to be where the pre-release controversy landed: would the band be convinced to abandon their lovably quirky sound and suck the golden tit of Casey Kasem?

Well, yes and no. This album almost leaks it's so full of hits. Say that five times fast and it becomes a Phish fans nightmare: no one wants to see their idols grow up and get respectable. But if respectable means penning hits: "Hoist" is standing tall and proud. "Down with Disease" rocks. "If I Could" weeps. "Axilla (Part II)" is the funniest Blue Oyster Cult tribute I've ever heard...and the fact that it ends in post-Beatles psychedelia renders me silly with giggles. "Sample in a Jar" is perfect pop, pure and simple. "Wolfman's Brother" takes a funky riff out of the Shaft catalog, throws some Staple Singer- sounding vocals on it and it still comes out sounding like Phish.

Let's face it: Phish has been slagged by the too-cool everywhere: Hippies steal Zappa catalog and white hats flock. I've always considered these guys the underdogs and I'm pretty damn happy that they're raking in 10.3 million per year. And the fact that they're making really interesting albums for a major label makes me want to support them even more.

"Hoist," in the end, is like one of those Scooby Doo episodes when they had the guest stars on like Jonathan Winters Sonny and Cher and Batman and Robin and the entire episode was built around the appearance of the celebrities. It may have looked like desperation at the time, but it ended up making for great television.

Nate Brown is a student at the University of Vermont and loves life.

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Mark and Carrie welcome
 Good Citizen
 to the Burlington music scene

Joe Cunningham
 "Another Joe
 on the Street"
 Shiretown Records
 PO Box 238, East
 Randolph, VT 05041.
 Recorded at Noteworthy Studio,
 East Randolph, VT.
 Produced by Kate Youngdahl
 and Roger Stauss
 Released in 1994

by Alan Rench

Joe Cunningham grew up in Michigan and settled in Warren, Vermont. Somewhere between the two locations, he acquired a slightly twisted world view that he shares with us on "Another Joe on the Street," an eleven song collection on East Randolph's Shiretown Records. While the cover's photo of Hancock's Hubbard's Country Store and the musician listing inside paint a very Vermont picture, the lyrics urbanity contrasts the music's eclectic, almost neo-folky feel. Cunningham's characters share a vague, discontented yearning for something, anything: the woman in "All She Wrote" who finds herself naked on Sixth Avenue in a dream, the narrator of "I Fall in Love" who "...just can't seem to stay attached..." and perhaps the author himself who, in the title track, laments that "Now I'm forty-one, I'm almost forty two, I'm still not sure what I'm gonna do, I'm not even sure where I'm going."

While discontent and desire may not make for a comfortable, laid back life, they do equal an array of interesting portrayals: by the end of the album you've met a strange little group of people who share not only longing but also, more importantly: hope. "Might be the best rose in your garden might get pulled up by the roots, guess I'll take my chances opening up to you" he writes in "Opening Up to You."

The album features a veritable all-star band of Vermont musicians, including bassist Stacey Starkweather, drummer Jeff Salisbury and pianist Andy Shapiro. Tammy Fletcher of the Disciples is also featured with a very distinctive vocal turn on "Opening Up to You."

Recorded over five months at Granville's Noteworthy studio, "Another Joe on the Street" is an eclectic assortment of well-crafted pop songs that successfully introduce a singer/songwriter who may not know where he's destined, but who realizes that the journey is what it's all about.

Alan Rench is your friend. He likes you and everything that you do. That's just the kind of guy that he is. And he doesn't mind if you call him names behind his back. Go ahead.

reviews

Chin Ho!
 "Big Crowd"
 Monastery Records
 Produced by Chin Ho!
 Recorded at Eclipse, South Burlington,
 & Low Tech, Burlington, VT.
 Released in 1995

by Todd Terranova

"Big Crowd," the album, is the third Chin Ho! release, excluding a 7" project on Split Records with Burlington's Hover; and for this writer, it's a return to a style of music making where life is interpreted from the artists perspective and the listener is allowed to see things that they might not otherwise see.

Strangely enough, my favorite song on the disc are in order of appearance: "Big Crowd," the song, encompasses an amazing blend of vocals from lead singer Andrew Smith and guitarist Scott Stevens. Very catchy and very sensitive, leaving me inspired and inquisitive, even after the eighth time through. "Some things you just do instinctively/Some things are methodically planned/You make yourself a lot of promises/Some of them are smart/And some of them are not so smart."

"Jan Michael Vincent," - which the whole world is already referring to by the chorus "Water Falls" - blew me away again with the vocals from Smith. And on this cut Smith is joined by Hover's Jan Tofferri on back-up vocals for an amazingly catchy hook-filled melody. The hard and groovy guitar riffs from guitarist Dave Morency balance the vocals and lyrics tastefully throughout.

"World," a fast paced rocker that bases it's characters in Burlington, takes an intense groove that heats up and then relaxes when Smith starts the story.

"Glover Tonight," a very-Vermont tale, and "Sticker," an apparent love-song dedicated to Vermont's super-rock-heroes Phish, finish out the EP on a quieter, more introspective level that serves to remind you that behind every angst-filled boy there usually awaits a man who knows better.

The lyrics are a major high-point of the disc for me: the tales that Smith tells are emotional short stories that almost make you feel like you're dropping into someone else's life for a few minutes. Expressive, open and understandable lyrics are hard to find in today's music. Sometimes it's easier to use phrases that sound cool but hide the message. "Can't fight the seether?"

Overall, "Big Crowd" deserves attention. Careful: it may leave you insightful. This is when music becomes art for me: when it mirrors life.

Todd Terranova is a free lance writer and he is the friendliest doorman in Burlington.

Envy

"The Venus E.P."
 207 Church Street, #13
 Burlington, VT 05402
 Recorded by Gus Zeising
 at Low Tech Studio, Burlington, VT
 Released in 1994

by George Sand

Do you remember the Psychedelic Furs? Do you like Mazzy Star? Can you sing and dance? None of this matters, trust me, except that if you're inclined to sing and dance: you're ready for "Venus", the 4 song EP released last fall by Burlington's Envy.

From the Silvertone-like lead into "Drowning" to the shrill and pungent antiphon in "Alien," the guitars fill the room with sweet sound. There are two rockers and two melancholy pieces to sample. Intense even in its slowest moments, this stuff truly rocks, with Matt Hutton's shouting rasp keeping the music suspended just above the ground... "Where are you coming from? What does that say about you...?"

Melanie's bass and Ann Mindell's drums are solid and melodic, particularly in "1,000 Lies." Sean Toohey sings this weighty and sorrowful track. Listen to it with headphones on to get the full effect.

"Drowning" is also down tempo, but at the end, Sean takes us into another plane with his own version of the truth. Screaming cats in slow motion. It's true, he does scrape his guitar against his amp in a fit of emotion and blind passion.

"Bomb," a version of which will be released on an upcoming single from Split Records, is hard-edged and heavy: the tune is so pretty it will give you nightmares. Such is the plight of those who seek enlightenment in loud meditation and pop mantra. Don't say I didn't warn you.

George Sand was an eighteenth century writer and free thinker. She drank, smoke, slept with Chopin and was the subject of the movie "Impromptu."



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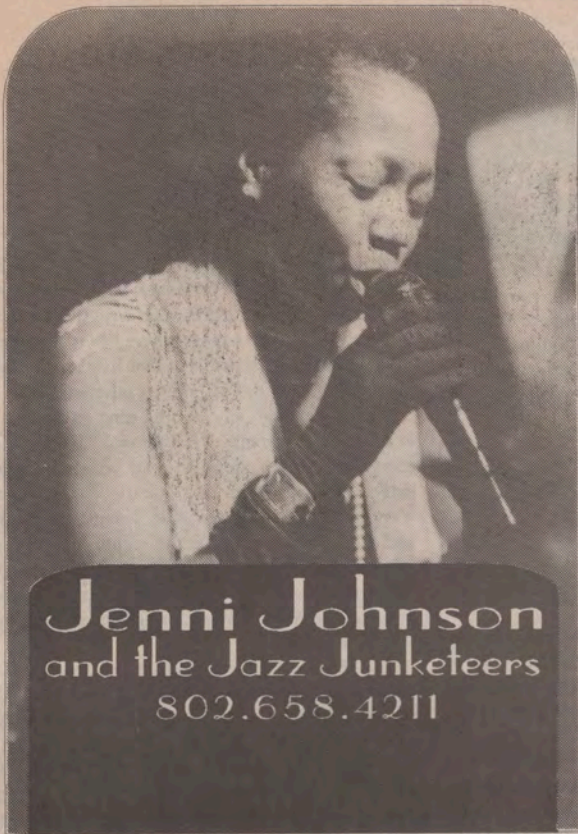
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