

Canadian band plays its own way

By Brian Bloch
Emerald Reporter

The Northern Pikes, a hard-rocking foursome from Canada,

are breaking into the American music scene with their new album "Secrets of the Alibi."

"Big Blue Sky," the band's first album, went gold in Canada following its release in 1987

and their newest release is well on its way to hitting the 50,000 copy mark. In addition, the band debuted its sharp-edged, insightful tunes when opening for Robert Palmer's American tour last fall.

The energy the group radiated to the audience during their Nov. 15 performance at the Hult Center was a sharp contrast to Palmer's stockbroker style and light, pop lyrics.

Scant stage props and lighting did not stop the band from stirring the audience to a frenzy as group members screamed and pounded out songs, giving the type of performance that Music Television (MTV) veterans like Palmer seemed to have forgotten.

According to Pikes lead guitar player Bryan Potvin, the band concentrates on the lyrical content and feeling of their music rather than trying to capture the ever-so-refined pop sound.

"We're very much a song group, we're not much for attitudes," Potvin said. "Someone will come up with an acoustic guitar and play the song and sing it and, if it can't stand on its own in that sort of stripped down, naked folk style, we won't pursue it."

"The lyrics are very personal," drummer Don Schmid said. "They're personal observations that we see or situations that are happening in the world that we'd like to voice an opinion on or make people aware of."

In "Secrets of the Alibi," the band also takes a down-to-earth, uncolored look at the sometimes chaotic, violent and painful corners of society.

"There's not many of our songs that are about fast cars and fast women; we try to keep things as relevant as possible," Potvin said. "Not to some conjured-up rock 'n' roll world where KISS lives."

"There's already so many people doing that kind of music — why just cast yourself among a bunch of others that are following that sort of mainstream format?" Schmid said. "I think we're a bit different, sometimes a lot different than any other band. And as a result, I think it will take us longer to make people aware of who we are."

In the meantime, the band seems content on cranking out its own brand of music.

"As far as career aspirations go, mine would be that our sound become mainstream," said Potvin. "Again, I think we're sort of the alternative mainstream, just a bit different



Courtesy photo

Merl Bryck, Don Schmid, Bryan Potvin and Jay Semko (left to right), collectively known as the Northern Pikes, are a Canadian band beginning to be heard in the States.

but not so different that someone who likes Bon Jovi can't find a couple songs of ours that they like."

Unlike many bands today, the Pikes are committed to producing music that pleases them instead of simply catering to an audience or compromising their music principles.

"We always please ourselves first," said Potvin. "I mean, a true success for us is when we walk out of the studio after finishing a record and it sounds real good to us. If it sells, then that's great but that's all bonus."

Although the group's relative lack of popular and financial success can pose its own problems, band members said that emphasizing material success may lead bands into compromising the underlying values of their music.

In Potvin's words, "The whole value system in North America really is a mess. The almighty dollar really dictates everyone's mind. There's so many people out there with jobs they hate but they do it because they can make a buck. You just can't get caught up with money."

"We're really not making money, but we're making a living and getting by doing what we want to do," he added.

According to Potvin, the Pikes gained much of their inspiration during the punk movement of the early 1980s when bands like U2 were giving new meaning to the term popular music.

"We really got off on the energy of that time," Potvin said. "People were really starting to

concentrate on the pop song and trying to instill some energy and kick music in the ass a bit."

Group members also are influenced by a host of other music styles, including country music and rhythm and blues.

Since the group's formation in Saskatoon in 1984, it has opened for major groups like Duran Duran and David Bowie. Group members also have played in small Canadian clubs before touring the United States this year.

"We really try to make it a priority that every night is important — whether it's Eugene or L.A., it really doesn't matter," Schmid said.

The bottom line is to have fun while producing their own kind of music.

"We really do believe in what we're doing, and we know that it will be hard. We'll just stick with it and know that one day we'll come out selling some records," Schmid said. "We're not going to quit."

Following the group's production of two videos and release of "Secrets of the Alibi" last August, it is planning to release a new demo recording sometime this month.

But the rest of the group's future remains uncertain.

"We just concentrate on the night at hand," Potvin said. "We really try to incorporate the idea of the moment being the important thing. It's best just to ignore all the bullshit and just worry about the moment; worry about writing good songs and putting on a good show."

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