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A brand new high? Treble Charger on life, evil record labels, and the happiness of music

Sean Patrick Sullivan

The Brunswickan

It seems Treble Charger has had their share of highs and lows in the past year.

Their latest album, *Wide Awake Bored*, was released to great success in Canada last year and the lead single, "American Psycho" and follow-up "Brand New Low" propelled it up the charts, allowing the album to reach Gold status (50,000 copies) the same month as *Maybe It's Me*, their major label debut released three years previous.

Months before the album's release, the American label behind the group (RCA) decided they didn't like it and weren't going to be putting it out, leaving the band scrambling for another label. Since then, the group has signed with Nettwerk Records for United States distribution; the album is to be released late-March/early-April.

After speaking with Treble Charger drummer Trevor MacGregor from his Toronto apartment where he has just gotten up and is making breakfast, it's clear they're happy with what they've been doing in the past few months and are more than confident in their future, which includes a show here in the SUB ballroom next Thursday with Sum 41.

There were three years between Maybe It's Me and Wide Awake Bored. What were you guys doing during the break?

We spent a lot of time touring the States – a tour with the Foo Fighters, with The Dandy Warhols, and a lot of one-off shows close to the border. After that, we basically wrote songs – about thirty for this album. Dealing with the label (RCA) too was kind of bullshit. They kept sending us back to write more songs, write more songs. Finally they were happy but they still wanted us to do the album in two parts. We finally did some songs they liked and they sent us down to LA to do five songs and those five songs were going to be the deciding factor as to whether or not we could go back and finish the album. That's the way labels are doing things these days...record half an album and if they hear hits, or what they think are "hits" on there, they'll send you back to finish the album.

Was the writing and recording of this album different from those in the past?

We did five songs at a friend's studio here where the whole band played and sent it off to our A&R guy. He was like, "You guys are so out of touch; this is shitty indie rock," and we were totally destroyed. He thought Bill (Priddle, bass) and Greig (Nori, vocals/guitar) should just sit in a room and write songs and lay them down with a drum machine. Unfortunately you kinda have to appease your A&R guy.

Is that the disadvantage of being on a major label now?

For sure. You have to deal with a hundred assholes who all think they know what they're talking about and what kind of music you should be writing. It's all the same – every band who's been on a major label will tell you you have to deal with a lot of idiots. It's the price you pay to have access to their funds. It costs a lot of money to break a band, and they have it.

You seem to have got a pretty good break, because Wide Awake Bored took off a lot faster than Maybe It's Me – they went gold in the same month (but released three years apart). Any idea why?

I just think we've progressed as a band. I think *Maybe It's Me* is a great album but "American Psycho" just seemed to click with people.

"Red" and "Friend of Mine" were both really successful songs...

Yeah, that's what I thought too. I thought the success we had with *Maybe It's Me* was great; it was unfortunate it took three years to go gold, but, you know, the bands I listen to almost never go gold so I was stoked we even made it to there. When this new album went gold it was a shocker for all of us. We had a feeling "American Psycho" was a song that would click with people a lot more than "Friend of Mine," but had no idea it would be so fast.

What do you think of the Canadian music scene right now? Any bands in particular that you're listening to?

Well, I hate to say it, but there aren't really any major label bands that are doing anything for me right now.

What about smaller bands?

Definitely, there's tons of great bands. Right now I'm listening to The Weakerthans and they're amazing. And of course, the new Propagandhi is great – it's not even out yet but I got it off Napster – I hate to say it, but I'm going to go and buy it when it comes out. [Laughs] There's a band called Bionic from Montreal who are amazing, a band here called Blurtonia. I just played drums on the new SNFU album; I'm a huge fan of those guys. What else...there's a band called The New Pornographers that Bill really likes. I thought the new Limblifter album was pretty good too.

While we're on the topic, what does Treble Charger think of Napster?

I'm the only person in the band who likes it; everyone else hates it. Honestly, the last ten CDs I bought were ones I sampled off Napster. You can't argue with statistics – the record industry is not suffering because of it. I remember back when dual cassette decks came out – people said that would ruin the music industry because people



were just going to tape everything. I think it's actually improved sales.

What do you generally do when not doing Treble Charger stuff?

We all kinda do different things. Rosie (Martin, bass player) and Bill play golf, play tennis [mocking a bit]. Greig manages Sum 41, so he's usually busy with that. I snowboard, skateboard, work on beats on my computer...

I wouldn't have expected golf and tennis from them...

[Laughing] Yeah, well...

I saw you at Edgefest in 1999 and Summersault last summer. Both times the entire band was decked out in crazy outfits; a Japanese theme for Edgefest and an army theme for Summersault. Should we expect anything for the show here?

When we were in L.A. recording we were checking out some second-hand stores and I saw one of those cone-shaped straw hats and told Rosie he should buy it and wear it on stage. We all laughed about it, but he ended up finding one in Toronto and got a whole kung-fu suit to go along with it. It was hilarious so we all just went along with it. If anyone comes up with good, funny ideas, we'll probably go with it. It'll probably be a summer festival thing.

How was Summersault? I heard it wasn't the massive band party I assumed it would be.

I've used this analogy before, but I'll use it again. It was like being in your first year of high school and getting invited to a cool, Grade 12 party, but all you do is just stand in the corner and talk to the one person you came with.

Was the 'one person' Our Lady Peace?

No, we got to know Eve 6 really well and that's why we asked them to do the tour with us in December. Finger 11 are all really good guys, and of course Sum 41. Our Lady Peace were cool; they've always been really nice to us. Foo Fighters were polite but kind of had better things to do.

Are Sum 41 as crazy as they are made out to seem?

They're Sum 41...they're not crazy, but all really funny guys. The one thing I can tell you that you should print: they also all have a strange rash right now around their anal region and I have no idea where it came from. [Laughing] They're all scared...they're young guys and have never experienced something like that before.

What are your plans for the rest of the year?

Heading down to the States. The album comes out there late-March, early-April. If we do get radio <play> down there we'll tour, if not, just head back up and try and write another album.

You're playing mostly smaller venues out here. Do you prefer those to larger ones?

I like smaller venues...bigger venues you can't see who you're playing to. We played a lot of clubs and theatres on this tour with soft seats where the kids couldn't really move around too much, which is why I like playing all-ages shows at bars.

On your webpage there was some mention of a game called 'Guess the Ass' from your shows in December?

It's a cool game...we did photocopies of our asses and we hold them up and ask the audience to point the ass to the band member.

How'd they do?

Pretty good. It's a tough game. It's hard with just a photocopy of a person's ass. I can tell you that mine is the least hairy.

Reel Reviews

Thirteen Days live on

Nick Logan

The Brunswickan

Most of us are old enough to remember some sort of Cold War threat. From the early days of the McCarthy-era witch hunts up until the fall of the Berlin Wall just over a decade ago, the Soviet Regime was something that many North Americans feared, whether they admitted it or not. The battle of words, espionage, and nuclear advancements between the United States and the former U.S.S.R. spanned four decades. The possibility of global destruction was on everybody's mind, but not so much as in October 1962, when, for the two weeks of the Cuban Missile Crisis, both sides waited with their fingers on their respective buttons. *Thirteen Days*, directed by Roger Donaldson, is a fantastic re-telling of the tension and distress that engulfed America and the men who were, quite possibly, the only hope in the prevention of utter obliteration.

The titular thirteen days began with the discovery that the Russians had secretly been implanting missiles into Cuba – missiles strong enough to reach almost any point in the States. Although they vehemently denied there was any sort of activity in the island nation, the Armed Forces had learned otherwise. Riding high on his approval rating was President John F. Kennedy (played by Canadian Bruce Greenwood). At his side were his brother and U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy (Steven Culp) and his private assistant Kenny O'Donnell (Kevin Costner). These three men held fate in their hands. But the film is not just about their own actions, it is about the complications that arose, the fight for command, and the underhandedness that existed both across the ocean and within the borders. The onslaught did not only come from the Communists but also the Navy, Pentagon, and the media; the warheads were not the only threat. The Navy did not trust the actions of JFK and his cohorts and a peaceful means to an end was clearly not a preferred option for them. The press knew something was not being revealed and were determined to find out and release it despite the repercussions. As fears and stress began to build the situation started to worsen.

One of the many terrific qualities of this film is that it is not your typical American glorification flick, it doesn't become überpatriotic or drastically over-zealous. It was, however, principally an American dilemma, so you do have to expect a little bit of the "Yay America!" sentiment. I'll warn you now that the film is a bit dry, but from my somewhat limited knowledge of Cold War films it is a convention: they thrive on intellect, tense exchanges of words, and a build-up of emotional strain. There is very little action despite the fact it is kind of presented in that manner in the trailers. This is actually a nice change and provides an interesting challenge to the actors, writer, and director. The dialogue-heavy plot is brought to life in a magnificent script by Philip D. Zelikow based on the book *The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the Whitehouse During the Cuban Missile Crisis*.

Of course, the actors had a hand in this as well. The film's strength relies greatly on the dynamics of Jack and Bobby Kennedy and Kenny O'Donnell. Kevin Costner is strong, however his Mayor Quimby-like B-ah-stun accent grates a little at first. It takes him a while to warm up to his character, but once he does he becomes fairly consistent and envelops the character nicely. Bruce Greenwood slides right into the role of JFK. The resemblance is far from uncanny, but his performance is terrific. Steven Culp also makes a viable turn as RFK. The three of them are exquisitely matched, depicting a chemistry that is both realistic and entertaining.

While I was enthralled by the dialogue-driven plot, many left the theatre with a chip on their shoulders. What action exists in the film is extremely well-choreographed and beautifully photographed, in particular the Navy reconnaissance over Cuba sequences. But, if you are looking for high velocity clashes, you're better off waiting for the Michael Bay (*Armageddon*) directed *Pearl Harbour* that effectively captures the essence of previous Cold War films. Just under a year ago, George Clooney produced a live, televised remake of the film *Fall Safe* with an elite cast of actors, including himself. His film was in ways superior to *Thirteen Days*, but in comparison one can see that you do not need a barrage of blood and guts in order to make a fine war film. Its mild depictions of hysteria amidst the crisis are great. At no time does it go overboard and become atrociously melodramatic – a quality many US-made war films lack. The film's production quality is very interesting. Various sequences are shot in completely different styles from each other, with unique choices of lighting and alternation between color and black-and-white, offering unique levels of intensity and verity. The use of the black-and-white photography itself provides the illusion of moments that have been frozen in time. Kudos to director Donaldson and the cast for a job well done.



Sean Patrick Sullivan/The Brunswickan

Arlibido rocked The Chestnut last weekend, delivering their brand of power-funk/pop to the crowd. The band is currently working on the first video for their latest album, All the World's America, and will be playing at The Cellar next month.

Summer Camp Jobs in the U.S.A. Lakeside Residential Girls Camp in Maine—Visas Arranged

Counselors: Combined childcare/teaching. Must be able to teach or lead one or more of the following activities: gymnastics, tennis, swim, sail, canoe, water ski, arts (including stained glass, sewing, jewelry, wood, photo), dance, music, theatre, archery, wilderness trips, field sports, equestrian.

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To Apply: Applications are available on our website: www.kippewa.com or contact us at the numbers listed below for a staff brochure and application.

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Bruns Staff

The Brunswickan

CHSR FM will be holding their Battle of the Bands again this year, and the prize is just as sweet the second time around.

Last February the station presented eighteen Maritime bands in a staggering 6 hour show at The Chestnut, giving great promotion to the bands and raising over \$3,000 for the volunteer-run campus radio station.

Once again, the grand prize is 30 hours of free studio time or a video produced by local company Outreach Productions.

The battle will be held Saturday, February 17, at The Chestnut. Applicants are invited to submit a short demo to the station by Wednesday, February 7, to be considered for the



show. There is a \$60 non-refundable processing fee for entrants (remember, it's for a good cause!) and each band will go through a review panel. Entrants will be notified by Saturday, February 10 if they have been chosen to perform.

The contest is open to all ages and all genres. Call 452-6054 or email chsrfund@unb.ca to enter.

CHSR holding 2nd Battle of the Bands