Not quite jazz or blues





Doug Estey (above) & Jens Ourom (below) / *The Brunswickan*

Bloc Party's display of musical talent wasn't limited to the stage on Saturday night. Singer Kele Okereke took it upon himself to get the crowd involved.

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"To be completely honest, I was slightly pessimistic that we would be accepted as a live band in North America because the musicianship over here seems to be so much better."

According to Bloc Party, how can one country be more musically talented than another?

"Personally, I think it's generally attributed to the fact that over here people have more space to rehearse, a garage or a basement for example. In England, we just have to hope that we have very understanding neighbours. So we were really surprised to how responsive people in North America were to our music."

Their third album, Intimacy, has already witnessed much hype, even though it doesn't officially ship until October. Instead of making fans wait it out, the band released a digital copy of the LP online and without any forewarning.

"We knew we wanted to come out with the album this year. We mostly just wanted a surprise. We weren't so much trying to avoid it leaking like the the last two albums leaked, because I think that has a negligible impact on record sales, but it's almost more because we find it rather disconcerting when we have to listen to what people think what it will sound like before it actually comes out."

Tong claims that while the new album is much more experimental and different from their previous work, the band doesn't have any trouble with it during live shows.

"We've never been that interested in playing our recordings to their entirety because we don't believe in patronizing our audience in that way. So many technical failures can occur with the way our music is played now that it isn't worth it."

He gazes out the window, sipping his depleted glass quietly through a straw, before furthering explaining further.

"I was watching the Foo Fighters the other day and quite honestly, it bored the fuck out of me. There just wasn't anything there. They play really well, but... that was it, you know? There was no tension, no sense of passion, and it feels less human."

For a group of musicians so intensely monitored and anticipated, the drummer and his band mates seem relatively care-free about how their music is received. From the dance rock guitar rhythms that stretch through their first album, Silent Alarm, to the eclectic, stuttering electronic feel of Intimacy, they've certainly demonstrated their love for experimentation as well as their fearlessness of the general public.

Smiling as he casts his empty glass aside, Matt Tong stands up and extends his hand forward.

"Coming from London, it's always nice to be somewhere with trees and fresh air. I'm genuinely enthused to be here and I'm very excited for the show tonight."

When nostalgia goes too far



Pop Tart

Ashley Bursey

I started off seventh grade with a dream. It was something I had been anticipating for year, a follow-up to the decade of dance rehearsals already under my belt. In fact, my fourth-grade 'life plan' of sorts asked me to name my aspirations in life. They were, in this order: model, lawyer... and cheerleader.

On my first day of junior high, the I.J. Samson cheerleading team had a demonstration during the back-to-school pep rally. Their colours were yellow and black (later to be referred to as 'bruised bananas') and the mascot was a Samson Saber – a ferocious-looking prehistoric animal with bizarre tusks, a mainstay on our homemade black and yellow Bristol board signs.

Tryouts were to be held in a few weeks. I began preparing, learning how to properly clap my hands (it involves an exaggerated head-nod, if you can picture that), practicing the arm motions and jumps (high-V and toe-touches are any cheerleader's bastion moves), and yelling ridiculous chants, much to the chagrin of my poor parents.

When tryout day finally arrived, I was ready. There were butterflies whipping around my stomach and Vaseline slicked all over my teeth (a dancer's trick to keep her smiling.) I was wearing the skimpiest booty shorts I could convince my mother to buy me.

It took a week for them to post the results, but when they did, I was ecstatic; I was one of three seventh-graders to make the team. And I enjoyed it. From the freezing-cold jaunts to a local hockey rink to cheer for the boys' team to the drama that inevitably came with being part of a pack of hyper-social girls, it was all worth it.

My cheerleading career continued for six years. I spent each subsequent year on junior high and high school on the team, twice as captain. I branched out into the dance team. We were in the Christmas parade every year, wearing two pairs of extra-thick tights and sweaters underneath our uniforms.

Years later, I would go on to tutor a girl three years my junior, a girl who wanted desperately to be a cheerleader. She's in her first year of university now and has already made the team there – a huge accomplishment.

Now, as a university graduate, I can look at my cheer-days with nostalgia and good humour. It was an exciting time for me, a turbulent time, but it was something I could never forget.

It's sort of like that all over again. I didn't expect to be working in Fredericton after graduating from university. I expected this to be a springboard of sorts, a launching pad to bigger and brighter cities. I expected to be cavorting in Montreal, or trying to figure out the subway in Toronto.

But I'm here. And seeing everyone going back to classes – me, on the sidelines for the first time in 17 years – is a bit unsettling. I'm torn between wishing I was still a part of that world, and being eager to race into the next chapter of my life.

Not so much for 33-year-old Wendy Brown from Wisconsin. It was her story that opened the floodgates of my personal wander down memory lane. Just this week she was charged with felony identity theft.

It seems Brown has a 15-year-old daughter, who lives in Nevada with her mother. In a moment of inexplicable desire, Brown stole her daughter's identity and enrolled in a local school to get her diploma and, of course, join the cheerleading squad.

Oddly enough, she made the team (bizarre, especially considering her terrible bleach job). She allegedly attended practices, received a cheerleader's locker, and went to a pool party at the coach's house.

Brown has a history of identity theft, but this one takes the cake. It reeks of desperation; a depressed single mother, pregnant at 18, eager to relive the youth stolen from her. Perhaps she was resentful of her daughter, who, at 15, had her entire life ahead of her. Perhaps she just really, really wanted the hand of a letter-jacket stud tucked under her arm. Or maybe she just has a thing for short skirts and booty shorts.

Whatever it is, it's a rare case that lends itself to an interesting analysis. Of course, reliving our youth would be an incredible opportunity – fixing all the mistakes we made, unsaying all those stupid things we said, taking back all the drunken nights and awkward next-days.

But would we really want to do all that...as someone else?

Maybe, for Brown, it was the lure of the cheerleader. I can understand that. It was my dream, too. But she's 33. It's time to stop living vicariously through your daughter and realizing that short skirts and side ponytails can only get you so far - assuming, of course, that she wants to go further than the backseat of a football player's Chevy.

NB Film Co-op

YOUNG AT HEART
September 15, 8pm at Tilley Hall
Director: Stephen Waker
With: Young @ Heart Chorus
Run Time: 107 minutes

A hit among audiences and critics at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival, and winner of an audience award at the 2008 Los Angeles Film Festival, Young @ Heart is a humorous and inspiring doc that challenges the stereotypes of old age in a world obsessed with eternal youth.

For over 25 years, the Young @ Heart Chorus has entertained audiences at home and abroad with unique renditions of punk, rock and rhythm and blues songs by musicians as varied as Radiohead, Jimi Hendrix and The Clash. Of course, the average age of most rock 'n' rollers isn't eighty years young. As the group prepares for a new show hilariously titled "Alive and Well," Young @ Heart's taskmaster and choral director Bob Cilian has a new collection of songs for these lively elders to learn. Far from a novelty act, the group is as much about serious music and supportive community as it is a way to stay active and engaged in a society that often expects seniors to be passive and quiet. Documenting the unique challenges faced by this impressive collection of senior citizens, Stephen Walker's intimate and delightfully whimsical documentary demonstrates that the Young @ Heart Chorus only gets better with age. Funny, poignant and inspirational, the film offers the kind of wisdom that can only be cultivated with age, as the elderly protagonists cope with loss and forge on in an ever-changing society.

The NB Film Co-op presents the Fredericton Monday Night Film Series. The series partners are the Film Circuit, a division of the Toronto International Film Festival and the UNB Faculty of Arts. The series presents limited release, independent foreign and Canadian films for one-night screenings, with the goal of diversifying local access to cinema. These films are new or recent releases, which would not otherwise be available to Fredericton audiences on the big screen.

Get on the social music bandwagon



From The Tubes

Doug Estey

Discovering new music is, for some, a pretty exciting experience. For others, it can be a painful and discouraging effort.

Luckily, if you're dying for some new music but interested in sticking to your tastes, you no longer need to worry; when your hipster friends are busy attending dance parties in basements or waiting in line for concert tickets, you can turn to Last.fm as an avenue of exploration into the musical unknown.

If you think we're talking about some kind of radio station, give your head a shake. Last.fm is a free music recommendation service, based in the United Kingdom and brought to you by the internet. Taking your current musical preferences into account, it compares the artists you listen to against a community-generated database, spitting back at you a handful of new bands to check out.

It's smart, too. If your music collection consists entirely of Nirvana, you won't find Last.fm telling you to check out to Britney Spears or Fall Out Boy. Instead, you'll see links to Pearl Jam or Alice in Chains. Add in a little LCD Soundsystem or The Trews in there, though, and your recommendations will adjust accordingly.

The entire site is powered completely by its own community, and is therefore completely self-sustained. Using free-tagging, users can describe artists with keywords that help Last.fm in figuring out that, for example, Nickelback (tagged as 'canadian rock') doesn't sound like Death Cab for Cutie (tagged as 'indie').

In addition, the service generates artist profile pages automatically. For example, if you were to listen to something that Last.fm hasn't heard of before, it would set aside a page for other members to add a biography (which is also editable, a la Wikipedia) as well as images and video. Photos can be voted up or down to serve as the default profile picture for the artist, so that if the first picture of a band is upped by some moron with a three-year-old cellphone, it will be quickly cast aside by one taken with a digital SLR.

So how does Last.fm figure out what you're listening to? Microsoft and Apple's media players automatically notify it, right? The answer, of course, is no (although if you're using Songbird, it's a feature that comes out of the box.)

Instead, you have to download a handy little plugin called an 'audioscrobbler' which runs alongside whatever you use to listen to music and keeps your Last.fm profile up-to-date. This fun little bit is called 'scrobbling.'

The audioscrobbler code (or API for anyone who cares) is open source, which means that nerds all over the world can easily create a scrobbling plugin for anything that plays music. This means that even iPhones and Windows Mobile devices can help Last.fm keep track of what you're listening to, and therefore renders the service even more useful.

It has its quirks, but Last.fm is a great little service that is growing wildly popular across the net. It certainly does what it's supposed to, and it also servers a friendly little social media clique (without pokes and third-party applications.)

If you want to check it out for yourself, head on over to www.last.fm, sign up for an account, and get scrobbling. Fresh tunes are a beautiful thing.

Doug Estey is the Arts Editor for The Brunswickan. His Last.fm username is xxxvision.