

The Superfriendz?

By MELISSA BUOTE

Like a broken record, the pens of journalists repeatedly and almost thoughtlessly scribble out comparisons of the Super Friendz to bands like the Kinks, Television, the Beatles and Sloan. Yes, that's right, you've heard it all before. It's old news. Not only that, it is completely wrong, too. The Super Friendz can be compared to one band, and one band alone -- The Monkees.

That's right. The Monkees.

Flashback to 1995. After the release of their first full length album, *Mock Up, Scale Down*, the Friendz found a balance between champions and naysayers. In the midst of critical acclaim, Juno and ECMA nominations, and numerous successful cross country tours, some of the doubters laid claim that the boys in the band were, indeed, not playing their instruments on the recordings. What a foolish thought! It was pretty reminiscent of the Monkees, though; the only difference, of course, being the claim against the Monkees was, at first, true. Go figure. Sure the seventies TV stars eventually learned to play their instruments, but the Super Friendz knew how from day one.

With all the musical politics behind them, the Friendz have moved on to a slightly more amusing aspect of Davy Jones fever: the fans are acting sitcom-ishly bizarre. Take the two young lassies who ambled straight into one another while scoping out one of the guitar players at a recent Halifax all ages show. Way to set the scene, no? And to think retro clothes and vinyl are back in style and The Monkees are back on TV. It all adds up.

Fast-forward to the

present and the Friendz have a new album -- *Slide Show*. This is where the Monkees comparisons come to an all too needed halt. This album is no *Hey, Hey We're the Monkees*, in fact the band's style has veered away from the poppy pitch of *Mock Up, Scale Down* and the *Play the Game, Not Games* vinyl EP released last fall.

"[This album is] reacting to what people may expect the Super Friendz to do considering that everyone else in this area has been putting out pop albums pretty straightforwardly," declared guitarist Matt Murphy of the band's latest offering, "there are four or five songs that are just basic pop songs with choruses and everything you'd predict, but basically we're just trying to switch the form a little and see what we can get away with. If we don't always get away with it, that's fine because all rock and roll is trying -- that's all it's about."

Murphy's "Up and Running" and "Forever A Day" offer up as fodder for singles with their outright pop qualities and hooky accessibility, but the Friendz also stray into less treaded musical ground with guitarist Drew Yamada's "Citizens Banned" and bassist Charles Austen's "Slow Motion Blues." This pioneering spirit, accompanied with the addition of permanent drummer Lonnie James is helping the Friendz forge their own path away from the sound now defined as "Halifax Pop."

"We had these songs that didn't call for super pop treatment in the studio. They called for the organic natural live recording and that's what we did. We didn't try and turn our songs into pop songs because they weren't.

"With this great Sloan

album that was put out and everyone else [playing pop music], we just wanted to cut our own little territory and be done with comparisons. We just really wanted to express who we are as people more on this album than on the last one. The last one was more about getting good songs out and this one was like 'let's get good songs that really show something about us.' So, it brought out personality as a band and as people individually and I think the result is something a little more abstract, but it is not noise. It all makes good musical sense and there is a good logic to all the songs and why the progress in a certain way. A lot of them don't conform to the traditional pop form -- this time we just wanted to see what we could do -- take some chances."

Perhaps fans might find the seemingly sudden switch in style confusing. In turn, perhaps that is exactly what the band wants.

"We have a squeaky clean image. We don't cause a lot of crap on the road or anything. It would be fun to play around with it though. Just because there is an expectation of us right now, so it is really easy to play around with it and it's fun just to confuse people and that's what it's all about -- people like the confusion and I like the confusion. Like at the in-store we did [at Sam the Record Man in Halifax], we sort of dressed up in a glamorous way: make-up and fur coats. Kids are like 'do you guys always wear make-up? Why are you wearing make-up? What's with the fur coats? It looks cool... I think. I don't know though.' And then playing that kind of music with that kind of clothing has a weird relationship. Pretty distant."

With a back-log of pop gems written and ready to record, perhaps there will be more chances to mirror the Super Friendz with the Monkees, but until then perhaps journalists and critics alike

will have to learn to accept the Friendz' style as their own. Then again, we can always spend our time figuring out which Super Friend would be Davy Jones and which would be Micky Dolenz.



It's up and running, getting the funniest looks from everyone they meet. Superfriend or Monkee? You decide.

photo M. Buote

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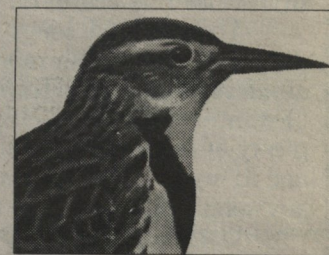


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