

True Patriot Love

by Alec O'Hanley • Ast & Entertainment Editor

Throughout the ages, one thing has remained constant in popular music. There have always been people bemoaning the state of the music industry. It's incredibly easy to view the current music scene as being in a state of muck and mire. There's always good music available, sometimes it's just harder to find. Instead of complaining, realize that popular music goes through a cycle.

A friend of mine and I talked about this once and came to the conclusion that the scene is a sine wave of amount good music as a function of time (Jesus, science has ruined me), bobbing up and down, reaching a peak every three or four years. Music hit a peak in 1993, and quickly declined after Kurt Cobain's death. Popular music had recovered by 1997, a year which gave birth to Radiohead's phenomenal album *OK Computer*. Peak time has come again. I believe music had a great year in 2003, which will hopefully continue. Last year was especially kind to the Great White North music scene. Yes, we humble Canucks kicked some star-spangled Yankee ass last year in a red and white rout not seen since the 1992/1993 back2back World Series victories for the Toronto Blue Jays*. I always thought the whole concept of describing music was a pretty useless thing (so why am I up reading reviews all night?), because what one gets out of a song is a pretty subjective experience. That said, I will attempt to list the four (yeah, four, eat my butt) best Canadian albums of last year and explain why they're so great.

4. Joel Plaskett – Truthfully Truthfully

Truthfully Truthfully kicks ass from the get-go, takes a needed breath in the latter half, only to give way to a spirited second wind. Halifax rocker Joel Plaskett has always sung about Canadian locales. On his latest album, he grapples with the idea of moving to bigger cities, an especially resonant issue for many Atlantic Canadian youth ("All my friends / Where did they go? / To Montreal, Toronto") Plaskett is at the head of the current Maritime rock movement (*In-Flight Safety*, *Wintersleep*, *Matt Mays*).

Standout track: *All the Pretty Faces*

3. Sam Roberts – We Were Born in a Flame

Montrealer Sam Roberts is another Canadian artist who isn't afraid to sing about Canada. *We Were Born in a Flame* is made up of well-constructed songs with hooks to spare. Sam has an unbelievable ability to create multiple strong melodic vocal lines over one set of chords. So what if it's straight ahead rock – the album's got loads more going for it than most. It's catchy and intelligent. The attention this band has garnered is well deserved.

Standout track: *The Canadian Dream*

2. The Unicorns – Who Will Cut Our Hair When We're Gone?

Another great product of Montreal other than smoked meat, The Unicorns show great innovation in both sound and structure. There isn't a chorus to be found in any of these songs; instead, new ideas are constantly introduced. Most tracks revolve around sounds from what sounds like a ten-dollar Casio keyboard and oddly enough, it sounds effing brilliant. Nicholas Diamonds and Alden Ginger trade singing duties and act like kids throughout ("I'm still a great big star / No you're not! / Yes I am! / No you're not / Yes I am!"), giving WWCO-HWWG a childlike feel. This album sets its sights on doing away with boring music once and for all.

Standout track: *Jellybones*

1. Broken Social Scene – You Forgot it in People

Don't be fooled by their name, they don't even resemble hardcore punk. In fact, they probably don't resemble anything you've ever heard. This Toronto collective (with as many as sixteen members) quietly put forward an amazing album in 2003, then, slowly, people stopped what they were doing, heads turned, and eyes looked up. After toiling in relative obscurity in bands like *Do Make Say Think* and *Stars*, a dozen or so friends got together to get it right. They won a Best Alternative Juno, won over critics, and haven't glanced back. This group has changed what a band is and what a band can be. Broken Social Scene is the cream of last year's crop, having created a diverse yet connected group of swooning ballads, soaring anthems, and sheer genius. If you

decide to try listening to any one band in this article, let it be Broken Social Scene.

Standout track: *Anthem for a Seventeen Year-old Girl*

Honorable Mentions

(in no particular order):

Weakerthans – *Reconstruction Site*
In-Flight Safety - Vacationland
Sloan – *Action Pact*
Wintersleep – *Wintersleep*
Manitoba – *Up in Flames*
The Constantines – *Shine a Light*

* Upon writing this article, I decided to look up my old friend and favourite baseball player of 1992, Kelly Gruber. Turns out he only hit .105 in that '92 series. Needless to say, I felt appalled and betrayed. Why did I like this player? Was I mental? I delved further into this sad story: "Once extremely popular in Toronto, the third baseman became the object of the fans' scorn, with newspaper columnists and even club officials calling him "Mrs. Gruber" " (www.baseballlibrary.com). Oh Kelly, you took my heart and stepped on it with those pointy rubber cleats of yours. Shame on you. Shame on you for making me love you.

