There's a Little Jimmy Swift in Everyone

by Stephan MacLEOD

The Jimmy Swift Band is starting to see results after years of jamming at countless shows. Aaron Farr (drums), Aaron Collier (keyboards), Mike MacDougall (bass), Craig Mercer (guitar/vocals) and Jacob Smith (guitar) have dazzled audiences across Canada with their live techno funk and rock-pop. With the release of their latest album, Now They Will Know We Were Here, their eclectic sounds are spreading and their following is growing.

Mike MacDougall is surprised by the attention the band is receiving, and finds fans popping up in unexpected places. "I was in the bathroom taking a leak in a stall. I opened the stall door and walked out and these guys were staring at me, and one of them said 'You play for Jimmy Swift!'"

The band was mobbed onstage by young fans at the same show [Music in the Market Festival in Moncton, New Brunswick].

"A lot of young people stormed the stage. They wanted CDs, and for us to sign them," says Mike.

"The crew actually made us take them outside because the other band couldn't get on the stage."

The show in Moncton was the first time The Jimmy Swift Band performed at an all ages concert. Based on the reaction of the audience, Mike MacDougall says it will not be the last.

Craig Mercer, was bewildered by the reaction of younger fans. "It was like 'How the fuck did these kids in Moncton ever hear of us?'"

The band's popularity in Moncton does not end with mobs of minors. "There's a band there covering our tunes. It's insane," says Mike.

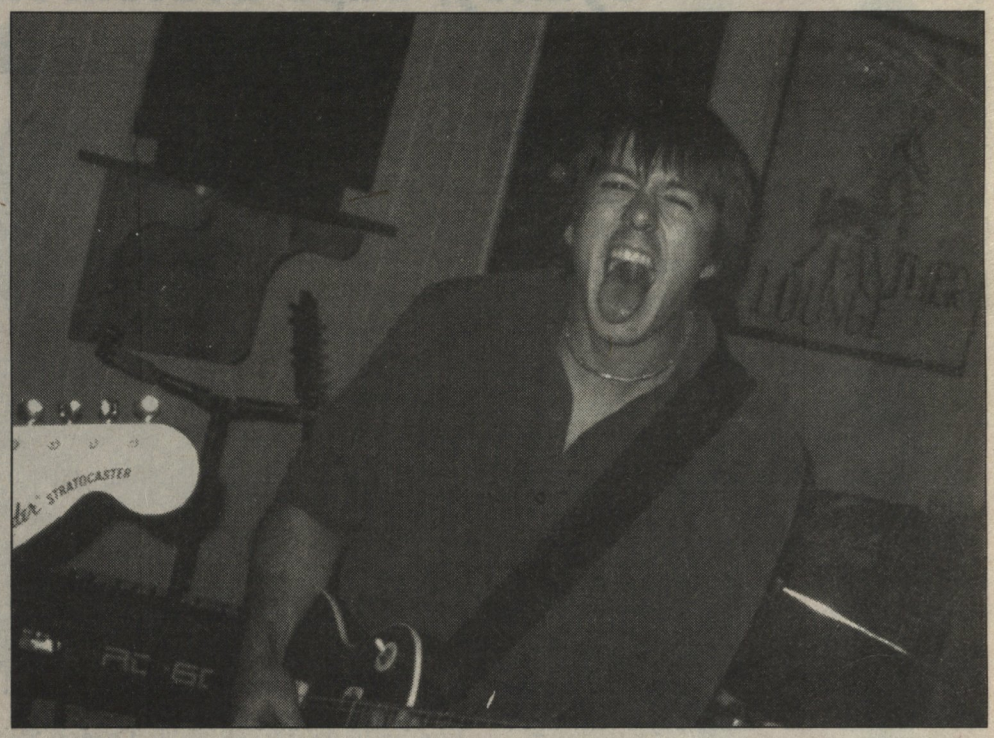
Jimmy Swift's fame may spread further as the band prepares to release a video for the song, "Drive By." Helping them turn the song into a video will be Chris Cooper, who edited all the episodes of television show *The Kids in the Hall*, the movie *Brain Candy*, and the David Foley film *The Wrong Guy*.

Being able to trust their image to the team making the video is important for the band. Mike has a lot of control over how the band is perceived in terms of posters, album layout, and t-shirt design because he creates the imagery himself.

"It's hard to come up with an image when it's completely about the music for you," says Mike, "It's better to just let your image evolve from the music. I try and do that. I think of imagery from the tunes we write. I'm really influenced by spacey themes and mysteries of the universe type things."

"Trying to bring those elements together visually is always a challenge," Mike continues, "It would be easy to just come up with some lame poppy image and throw it out there. But, you don't want to sell yourself at all."

Craig says, "It's too bad that the music industry is about [selling yourself]. With every passing day it becomes less and less about music and more and more about image."



Craig Mercer — "Whazzuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuup!"

"The music industry is like any other industry," says Mike, "There's a need for the Backstreet Boys. I don't share it, but I totally appreciate and respect everything that comes from that angle of the music industry. It's just like anything else. There's a need for McDonalds too, but it's not probably the healthiest stuff to eat."

"If you write that, I might get sued," Mike says, pondering the libel laws for a university newspaper.

Inspired to challenge the libel laws further, Craig adds, "My favourite thing right now is McDonalds new slogan: 'There's a little McDonalds in everyone.' Somewhere hard in your colon, there's a little McDonalds."

Besides dealing with conflicts between music and image and lawsuits from fast food chains, The Jimmy Swift Band also faces the challenge of balancing the styles of music it creates. The band's songs range anywhere from well crafted rock songs, to improvisational electro-funk instrumentals.

Craig says, "The two sides of the band is what makes us a little bit different among jam bands."

Instead of using the different styles of music as an excuse to form separate side projects, Jimmy Swift uses all of its variations as the distinct characteristics that make up its overall personality.

"Sometimes there's a little bit of pressure to really narrow your focus, but I don't believe in that. Just the fact that all the ideas come from the same place, the same teamwork writing style, there's enough coherence in our sound that we don't have to separate the two different styles," explains Mike. "Lots of time [the styles] come together. We're working on a new song right now that's completely a mix of those two elements," says Mike.

I wanted to finish this article with some sort of memorable statement that sums up what the band is all about, and how great their live show is, but I'll end it with a request from Mike that I was unable to fit in the rest of the story.

"Grand Theft Bus is my favourite band in the Maritimes. I want that in the interview," says Mike.

How could I refuse?

Mike MacDougall is a mystery of the universe. Way to go Mike!