

# Behind the Scene: the Making of *Before the Big Feast*

by Stephan MacLEOD

The value of a music scene is judged by the quality of compilation albums. Charlottetown has a history of producing compilations of local independent artists. From cassettes of the underground hardcore scene to the *Eat This* CDs, bands often share the bill on an album to promote the music scene. While these collections of artists captured moments in Charlottetown's musical progression, they were usually produced in a hurry. Like the *Gigzilla* compilation that came out a couple of years ago, a lack of recording experience and planning failed to do justice to the work of local artists on previous compilations.

After a brief dry spell in our music scene in terms of CD releases, a small but crucial flood of new albums emerged. Flush, Eyes For Telescopes, The Rude Mechanicals, The Tuesdays, and Nathan Wiley have all contributed to a growing catalogue of albums by Island musicians and bands. The growing output of original music by local musicians has made festivals comprised mostly of homegrown talent like Close to the Coast possible. Events like this have attracted a growing audience for all of these bands on PEI. Releasing a compilation featuring these bands and other new unrecorded acts seemed like the natural next step for Lloyd Doyle and Pat Deighan, organizers of the Close to the Coast events and countless other shows in Charlottetown.

Lloyd Doyle, the manager of Eyes For Telescopes and president of Sandbar Music Group, has a child-like enthusiasm for the Island music scene. Although he recently celebrated his fifty-fifth birthday last month in between catching performances at Baba's and Brennan's, Lloyd is one of the most active members in an emerging musical renaissance in Charlottetown. Providing a helping hand, a little bit of guidance, and the wisdom and cautiousness he has gained through experience in promot-



ing music, Lloyd took the initiative after Pat Deighan put the idea of releasing a compilation of local bands into his head.

Luckily, the P.E.I. Department of Community and Cultural Affairs also liked the idea of promoting the music scene through a compilation, so a much needed grant was put in place to get the project off the ground. With the support needed to fund the album, Lloyd enlisted the help of Pat Deighan, Morgan Merrit, Luke Leunes and myself to organize the artists, recordings, and artwork for the CD.

When it came time to compile a roster of artists in Charlottetown for a compilation, Pat Deighan of Eyes For Telescopes was the best person for the job. His diverse taste in music, years of experience as a local musician and friendships with other talented musicians throughout the scene aided him in organizing the line-up of the album. Lloyd's vision of the CD was a "snapshot of a music scene in the middle of a creative eruption." Pat took that vision one step further and

enlisted artists who had yet to release material on their own to contribute brand new tracks to appear alongside the previously released songs of established bands. The New Drifts, Motel Money Murder, Under the Hood and the Swindle Project were all given a chance to record songs with several new side projects by Dan Currie of Eyes For Telescopes, Vert DeFrance, and Deighan's solo work in the Orb Weavers. In Pat's hands, this compilation was not merely a snapshot of what was happening in the scene, but an excuse to increase P.E.I.'s creative output and perhaps give a taste of what's to come.

The idea to record brand new songs, specifically for this album, complicated the process of getting the CD together on time. Compromises had to be made to ensure that the finished product accurately reflected the quality and talent of artists involved, so Lloyd avoided rushing through production. Producer Morgan Merritt was under a lot of pressure to capture the essence of the bands he recorded in a

short amount of time.

Morgan experienced a similar lack of time and resources when he recorded the Tuesdays debut album, *Build a Horse*, over three late nights last summer. Seasoned veterans from his Tuesdays sessions, Dennis Ellsworth, Dan Currie, and Pat Deighan, all got a chance to refine their solo work with Morgan's help when they worked with him once again on brand new songs for the compilation. Under the Hood and Motel Money Murder took their first crack at recording with Morgan's assistance. All five of the new songs Morgan was involved in producing stand alongside the previously released studio tracks on the album.

Along with Morgan's recordings and songs that were previously released, several artists recorded their own new material. Luke Leunes' trippy alter-ego, Mr. Dr. Octopus, contributed an experimental home recording, "Free Venom", for the CD. Luke also designed the artwork and came up with the concept for the disc. Luke's idea for the packaging of the album was to create a storybook world representing the local music scene. The cover gives us a glimpse into a mysterious world of animals dressed up in period costumes about to celebrate dinner. He named the album *Before the Big Feast* because the scene is just getting started and has yet to reap its rewards.

Luke sees something fantastical in the community of musicians and music lovers in Charlottetown. It plays out like a bizarre children's book to him. The amazing thing about what's happening with music in Charlottetown lately is the effect it has on people like Luke, Lloyd, Pat, Morgan and the musicians and fans that make up this scene. Different personalities and musicians are coming together because of projects like *Before the Big Feast* and local music festivals.