

The Rude Mechanicals Get Rock Down to a Science

By Ryan O'Connor

These are interesting times for the Island's top musical act. After a hectic two and a half years together, and considerable local success, the Rude Mechanicals aren't about to rest on their laurels. If anything, they appear to have busier plans than ever.

After releasing two albums, and a video that appears regularly on MuchEast, this band on the rise has also been showcased at events such as at the East Coast Music Awards and the North by Northeast conference in 2000. But that's just the beginning of their struggle to attain the much heralded, but ever-elusive, "big break."

The Rude Mechanicals were formed two and a half years ago by five students while attending the University of Prince Edward Island: Dennis Ellsworth [vocals, guitar], Peter Forbes [guitar, vocals], Todd MacLean [guitar, saxophone], Matthew McQuaid [bass, vocals], and Mike Mella [drums, vocals].

The group's first album, *The Prologue Is Addressed*, was released in July 1999. Warmly received, and boasting a local hit single and video [Coquette], it was recently followed up by the launch of *Neutrinos* in December 2000.

According to Mella, "The first one we thought of as live off the floor, we just wanted to have an album. This one was more an attempt to get something a little more substantial and professional."

"We were together for only one year [when the first album was released]," added McQuaid. "We didn't have a lot of money, and we spent only five days recording it. This one [Neutrinos] was a lot more time, a lot more money, and a lot more effort in terms of the songwriting and things like that."

The release of *Neutrinos*, and all the work that coincided with it, is far from over. As McQuaid put it, "The next step is to do the whole mailout routine to the press and the record labels. Hopefully some small, or perhaps large, record company somewhere in Canada, will pick us up, which would then permit us to tour." As he further explained, "It's a catch-22. You can't get a gig in a club [beyond Prince Edward Island] because your album's not in the stores, but you can't get your album in the stores because you don't have a gig in the town."

Said MacLean, "We're [also] going to make a video. We have a couple ideas kicking around."

"Hopefully," added Mella, "in the same way that the first record was superseded by this one in all the effort and money, this new video will be a little more profes-

sional, not that the other one [Coquette] wasn't professional, but it was very low budget."

But the problem of being a big fish in the small musical pond that is the Charlottetown scene, coupled with the desire to grow as a band, may lead the group to relocate elsewhere in the near future. In essence, for the Rude Mechanicals to continue growing, it appears that they may be forced to leave Prince Edward Island. As MacLean explained "We've been playing on the Charlottetown music scene for about two and a half years, so we almost have no other choice. Really, if you're an original act in Charlottetown, it's kind of hard to keep up the momentum."

"There's always the idea of trying to make a career out of the band," added Mella. "If you're living here in town and playing, it's pretty hard to make a living for five guys by doing that. That's why we want to go where there's more venues per capita."

"More venues, and more [musical] industry" emphasized McQuaid. "Not that we don't have a good scene here — we have a great one right now. But it's only made up of a half dozen bands," he emphasized. "But we need more venues, and more [musical] industry [in order to gain attention]."

Another method employed by the band to gain attention is through the Internet. The band has an impressive web presence. As MacLean explained, "Matt and Mike did all of the website, and they did an excellent job. It's cool that we can make our own website."

The band has also embraced MP3 technology, seeing it as an excellent way to build a name for the music. As Mella explained, "The way we see this whole controversy with Napster is if you're so well off and successful, like Metallica, it shouldn't bother you that much. We benefit more from the publicity than it hurts us with our MP3s up there. It's either people hear us through that, or they wouldn't hear us at all. It's not like it's either that or they'd buy the CD."

The Rude Mechanical's tireless work has already begun to expand their fan-base to such places as Miramichi, New Brunswick. As McQuaid explained, this popularity came quite by chance. "It's a total fluke, actually. We got our first show there [opening] with McMaster & James, which we got because the opening act couldn't make it. We went over and didn't know what to expect. It was balls-to-the-walls excitement from start to finish, and the crowd loved it."

"The response was crazy. We've

been getting emails asking when we're coming back. We didn't think we could pull off a large-scale show by ourselves, but there's a guy over there who's kind of our promoter over there, who put on the push for us to do it. So we're like, 'if this guy wants to put in the work and take the risk, let's give it a shot.'"

Members of the group expect the show to attract in the neighbourhood of seven hundred fans, approximately the size of the crowd that saw them open for McMaster & James. According to Ellsworth, "It's kind of weird, they think we're big rock stars."

In their relatively brief existence, the band has already gained attention by sharing the stage with a number of established artists, such as Ron Sexsmith, Emm Gryner, The Watchmen, and Bif Naked. With word spreading, and an unquenchable desire to succeed, it seems that the Rude Mechanicals will be moving on in order to chase their goals.

Until then, you can catch them regularly at venues across town. You can also find them on the web at <www.therudemechanicals.pe.ca>.

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