

Stomping Tom, or Jimmy Flynn.

The thought of stalking celebrities all weekend was on my mind, but before reaching the underground tunnel to the Hilton, I noticed the Saint John Trade and Convention Centre, the location of the official ECMA showcases. Like an eight-year-old with attention deficit disorder, I completely forgot about my plan to stalk Joel Plaskett and started exploring the showcase venue. They had a well stocked gift shop with clothing that would look nice if it didn't have ugly ECMA logos slapped all over it. After the initial shock and disappointment of the overpriced, ugly merchandise we realized that we would be better off chasing rock stars around rather than looking at a bunch of crap.

Since we missed our opportunity to stalk Joel Plaskett, we decided to look at a local entertainment newspaper to see if any other celebrities would be in town. As my colleague would recognize the name of someone worthy of stalking, she would draw a heart around their name with one of our complimentary pens from the Hilton. After filling the newspaper with heart-shaped doodles around names like Chris Murphy, Jimmy Rankin, and Bruce Guthro, we hoped to bump into these East Coast megastars at the official showcases.

We found a table in the middle of the Convention Centre while Nova Scotia's Madhat blasted some punky alterna-tunes through a shitty sound system to an audience of music industry slime-balls and media types. Next up was Charlottetown's Flush, but while they were setting up two complete morons attempted to engage the audience with some banter. Besides having absolutely no chemistry and no clue about the bands they were presenting, the MCs were prone to not talking into their microphones - which would have been great if they could have not been on the stage at the same time.

Flush's set started well with a tremendous amount of energy. The crowd of execs and music pimps wasn't the most receptive audience in the world. There was something about the room full of sleazy old people sitting at tables that would be better suited to a Las Vegas magic act, not a young

hard rock group from PEI. Robbie Holland of Flush tried to get a reaction from the crowd by jumping off the stage and running around the tables with his wireless electric guitar in the middle of a song. As he was returning to the stage he stopped and said hi to me. I felt like talking for a bit, but he still had a showcase to finish so I took a photo then bid Robbie farewell as he rejoined the rest of the band on stage.

After Flush played, the moronic MCs annoyed the living hell out of me for another five minutes. Next up was an instrumental band from Cape Breton that blended new age techno and space-funk with hints of traditional Celtic music. Slainte Mhath (pronounced slawncha vha) have been plucking their instruments in the shadow of the older siblings, The Barra MacNeils, for several years now, but they have only just recently started getting recognition for their original sound and entertaining live show. They kind of sound like Underworld and Chemical Brothers except with fiddles and bagpipes instead of drum machines and samplers. They are also pretty inventive with the instruments they use. I've never heard a bazouki played through a wah wah peddle, a portable sewer pipe (with a handy shoulder strap) used as a percussive instrument, or a vocoder hooked up to a violin before I saw Slainte Mhath.

By the time Slainte Mhath finished up, Joel Plaskett was starting his set at Much Music's Dog and Pony Show at Tapp's. Now that we knew his exact location, we were not going to miss the opportunity to stalk him once again. A group of explorers from Sydney informed us that we did not have to walk in the cold, harsh environment outside to reach Tapp's. Our media passes gave us access to a convenient and free shuttle system that could drive us anywhere we needed to go. Darryl MacKinnon, an adventurer from Sydney was our guide to the shuttle service. A couple of mini vans with ECMA stickers on the window were parked outside the Trade and Convention Centre. One was already filled with other explorers in passes about to leave, so we opted to wait for the driver of one of the other vans to show up and safely transport us



**Joel Plaskett captured!**

through the confusing maze of one way streets in Saint John.

An elderly gentleman arrived and allowed us in his van. Other travelers quickly filled up the vehicle. Another group of Cape Bretoners joined us and we made fun of saxophone players as we left. Apparently the Cape Bretoners had difficulty in the last shuttle van they attempted to travel in. Something about getting thrown out of the minivan before it even left, and one of them actually thinking that they had arrived at their destination despite the fact that the van never left the parking lot. Our driver was really good at not kicking us out, and actually driving.

We arrived safely at Tapp's and got in free with our fancy media passes. No line up. No hassle. Joel Plaskett was in the middle of playing, so we sat at a table near the back to avoid arousing any suspicion. I was certain he had no idea we were stalking him, but you can't take any chances. If he ever made eye contact, or noticed us circling hearts around his name in newspapers, our cover would have been blown. I took advantage of him being distracted by playing a show to slowly make my way up to the front and snap a few pictures without him noticing me. The mission was a success.

After capturing Joel Plaskett's image, the thrill of stalking him came to an abrupt ending. I needed to move on to someone else. Rock Ranger were playing after him, but I've stalked those guys enough already. Charlottetown's Port Citizen had a

show at the ECMA 72 Hour Jam that evening. I've never stalked a local rock band before, so tracking down Port Citizen seemed like the obvious thing to do. My companion had a history of stalking PEI rock stars. With our combined experience, it couldn't be too difficult to get a few shots of Port Citizen. Despite our confidence, nothing could have prepared us for the difficulty of navigating through the cold snowy streets of Saint John.

The ECMA shuttle service stopped operating at around 1:00, so we had nobody to guide us. We had spent most of the day inside the connected tunnels of the mall downtown, and we knew our way around them pretty well, but once we emerged into the treacherous weather and the unplowed streets of downtown, we were completely lost. Maps of Saint John were included in our ECMA backpacks, and they were slightly helpful in finding the correct general direction of some bars, however the maps failed to mention which streets were one-way.

The second time I went down a road the wrong way, a police car pulled us over. I turned around and headed in the right direction. The third time I almost turned the wrong way onto another one-way street, the cop who was following me turned on his siren and told me through a mega phone that I couldn't turn left. I'm still unsure of how the roads work, but after a few turns and confusion I eventually found the 72 Hour Jam. It was conveniently located across the street from the bar we just came out of.