

Coasting? Hardly

by Alec O'Hanley
Arts & Entertainment Editor

Whereas typical jam bands are content to sit in a groove ad infinitum, Slowcoaster possesses a song-minded approach that many of their peers lack. Being a player's art, groove music sometimes struggles to maintain the listener's interest, but this is simply not the case for this Cape Breton collective.

Slowcoaster came into existence with the 1999 return of singer/guitarist Steven MacDougall and drummer Devon Strang from Vancouver and the addition of Mike LeLievre as bassist. The trio later became a quartet when percussionist Darren Gallop joined the group in the summer of 2002. In their four years as a band, they've released four self-produced recordings and show no signs of letting up.

Their 2003 release *Accidents and Excuses* is an eccentric mix that runs the gamut from hoedowns (read: "My brakes don't work in the pickup truck of life") to modern funk. Catchy hooks veer towards atonality, showing a level of sophistication that seems absent in most other Maritime groove bands. Maybe it's a jazz influence, maybe it's drugs, but it sure sounds good. The Scofield-influenced "421" conjures images of kids running around with dollar store whoosh wands. With two drum-

mers, careful attention is paid to the percussive side of the album. The production seems a little light on the bottom end, but this seems almost refreshing in a genre dominated by slap-happy bass wanks. Slowcoaster's songs possess a certain strangeness, providing a fine complement to MacDougall's manic brand of vocals.

In addition to being a part of Craig Mercer's Below Me Music (Jimmy Swift Band, Servo), Slowcoaster is also associated with the Sydney, Cape Breton House of Rock record label (Rock Ranger, The Squatters). Since their formation, the band has played hundreds of shows throughout the Maritimes and is not surprisingly in the thick of an extensive Maritime tour. Their talent has definitely garnered some industry attention, as they are slotted to play an ECMA Showcase on the 13th of February in St. John's.

Slowcoaster has found a niche where they can play their brand of slightly obscure music and still have a crowd hopping. So get off your feet this year and start dancing to something intelligent. They play Charlottetown on a regular basis and should definitely be sought out.

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