

Lunar Adventures Goes Fission

The time of the fusion bands has passed. Is it now time for musical fission?

The members of the local quartet Lunar Adventures seem to think so. Like the fusioners, they're working with

Off Beat

ALEX VARTY

electricity, song forms, and jazz, but while fusion, so promising initially, now seems stuck in the rut of its own formalized conventions, the music that Lunar makes develops in a series of leaps and divisions. Their songs can be shattered and rebuilt, and their electricity doesn't come entirely from a wall outlet.

This is most obviously apparent in a live setting, where the group can take some spontaneous, strange, and often strangely attractive twists in its pursuit of invention.

If you're listening to Lunar, listen first and listen close to Gregg Simpson's drumming. You'll hear, in the wash and pulse of his cymbals and snare, that there's a song, a chant evocative of times and places other than our own. Sometimes futuristic, sometimes tribal, Simpson's rhythms are one heartbeat of Lunar Adventures, and they beat not with stiff metrical precision but with all the fluidity of breath.

Over Simpson's magnificent roil, three other heartbeats pulse.

Bassist Clyde Reed offers the band another centre, with his muscular tug and twang. He doesn't walk so much as coil note upon note in tumbling acrobatics; his work is a flow of surprises.

Ron Samworth and Coat Cooke are Lunar Adventures' speaking voices: the nature of their instruments makes their contributions slightly less physically immediate than those of their bandmates, yet they are no less compelling.

Samworth's electric guitar has an unusually versatile voice. Sometimes it shouts with bluesy passion; elsewhere it can take on a hyper-articulate sheen of intellectual vigour. It's hard



Not fusion but fission, Lunar Adventures' music draws on jazz and a variety of ethnic forms to produce a splintered kaleidoscope of instrumental and compositional colours.

not to compare Samworth to John Scofield, but the parallels are becoming less valid with time, as this young player matures. And they don't exist when Samworth is speaking in another one of his voices, a heavily processed low-frequency moan that seems to address all of the things that can't be said in more conventional musical terms.

Cooke has a more singular voice, although it, too, can range from a muffled, breathy roar to an edgy squawk: his tenor saxophone playing is steeped in the traditions of Ben Webster, Archie Shepp, and John Coltrane, yet imitates none of those greats. Cooke uses the classic saxophone vocabulary to enlarge his own probing instincts.

All of these individual qualities are represented on Lunar Adventures' first CD release, *Alive in Seattle*. The disc works well, perhaps in part because it is a live recording, and the group can be heard flexing its improvi-

sational sinews on nearly 60 minutes' worth of extended compositions. There's a regional quality to some of the compositions (Gregg Simpson's writing in particular, is tied in to his unique sense of place and cross-cultural interactions, as a person of Scottish descent living on the edge of the Dollarton Native reserve and in the rain forest, and as an internationally respected painter with strong ties to the surrealist tradition), but the quality of the playing is anything but "local".

Like any artist, Cooke isn't quite satisfied with his finished product. "It's a good document of the band as it was when we recorded it," he says, and has nothing but praise for 9 Winds, the Los Angeles-based, artist-run record label that released it (and a compilation CD of Vancouver-based New Orchestra Workshop groups, including Lunar), but he knows that his band has already outgrown that particular set

of performances.

He cites a new solidity that has developed between himself and his 16-year playing partner Simpson (the two have been playing as an informal duet between Lunar rehearsals), saying that it has resulted in more moments of intimacy—solos, duets, trios—within the basic quartet format, and that it has also upped the amount of musical telepathy ("it's not there all the time, but it's there") that the band can muster.

"We've been coming back to Lunar with all of this energy that we've developed, and it's making me hungry to play more with all four of us," says Cooke.

With two du Maurier Jazz Festival appearances in the works (at Isadora's on June 23 and as part of the free Jazz at the Plaza concerts on June 30), Lunar will get to do just that in the very near future, and the band will surely provide Adventures for us all. ■



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TOP 50



Public Enemy's Def Jam LP *Fear of a Black Planet* continues to climb the Vancouver chart: this week, it's at number 8.

THE GEORGIA STRAIGHT TOP 50 is a weekly survey of the most popular albums in the Greater Vancouver area, based primarily on record sales charts provided by major retailers, and further modified by chart trend indicators such as new singles releases, radio airplay charts and add-ons, and trade magazine charts.

TW = This Week, LW = Last Week, WOC = Weeks On Chart

	TW	LW		WOC
1	1	1	SINEAD O'CONNOR <i>I DO NOT WANT WHAT I HAVEN'T GOT (Chrysalis)</i>	11
2	3		MADONNA <i>I'M BREATHLESS (Sire)</i>	2
3	2		PAULA ABDUL <i>SHUT UP AND DANCE (Virgin)</i>	3
4	4		BILLY IDOL <i>CHARMED LIFE (Chrysalis)</i>	5
5	8		HEART <i>BRIGADE (Capitol)</i>	7
6	6		ROD STEWART <i>DOWNTOWN TRAIN (Warner Bros.)</i>	10
7	—		THE JEFF HEALEY BAND <i>HELL TO PAY (Arista)</i>	1
8	11		PUBLIC ENEMY <i>FEAR OF A BLACK PLANET (Def Jam)</i>	4
9	9		VARIOUS ARTISTS <i>PRETTY WOMAN SOUNDTRACK (EMI)</i>	7
10	15		THE PRETENDERS <i>PACKED (Sire)</i>	2
11	5		VAN MORRISON <i>THE BEST OF VAN MORRISON (Mercury)</i>	7
12	7		ALANNAH MYLES <i>ALANNAH MYLES (Atlantic)</i>	44
13	13		COWBOY JUNKIES <i>THE CAUTION HORSES (RCA)</i>	12
14	14		THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS <i>ONE SIDED STORY (Chrysalis)</i>	3
15	10		MIDNIGHT OIL <i>BLUE SKY MINING (Columbia)</i>	14
16	12		SUZANNE VEGA <i>DAYS OF OPEN HAND (A&M)</i>	5
17	16		VARIOUS ARTISTS <i>TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES SOUNDTRACK (SBK)</i>	7
18	17		THE TRAGICALLY HIP <i>UP TO HERE (MCA)</i>	21
19	21		JANET JACKSON <i>JANET JACKSON'S RHYTHM NATION 1814 (A&M)</i>	35
20	19		FLEETWOOD MAC <i>BEHIND THE MASK (Warner Bros.)</i>	8
21	20		LISA STANSFIELD <i>AFFECTION (Arista)</i>	9
22	23		BEL BIV DEVOE <i>POISON (MCA)</i>	2
23	18		DEPECHE MODE <i>VIOLATOR (Sire)</i>	11
24	22		SPIRIT OF THE WEST <i>SAVE THIS HOUSE (WEA)</i>	10
25	—		THE NORTHERN PIKES	1

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