

Music

CD reviews, musician profiles,
performances and more

BY KEVIN KELLY

Free and easy

The Punters let it all hang out on new CD

When it comes to Newfoundland celtic music, The Punters rank as one of the more popular groups in the province.

Original songs like *Reena* and *Rise with the sun*, along with their unique versions of cover songs, have been part of the provincial music psyche since 1995. Their music has attracted fans here and across Canada and their shows are known for their high energy.

The nucleus of the band has always been guitarist Larry Foley and fiddler Patrick Moran. During their eight years as a group, band members have come and gone, but the quality or the music hasn't diminished. The Punters have made videos, performed on the Juno Awards, as well as highlighted hundreds of shows (including New York's Lincoln Center). They even scored music for both the provincial Liberal and Progressive Conservative parties.

Heave Away was rewritten and used by Brian Tobin in the 1999 general election campaign, while the

band sang Ray Lake's *There's Gonna be a Time Tonight* at the 2001 Tory convention when Danny Williams was elected leader.

"We walk the line," Moran jokes.

Adds Foley, "A gig is a gig, whether for politicians or at a bar."

The secret to Foley and Moran's special relationship? "We both like being foolish sometimes and I'm an easy fella to get along with," Moran says, laughing.

"We don't piss each other off," says Foley. "We're pretty passionate about it. All joking aside, we love to play music and maybe that comes across when people see us."

The group has just released *Fishermen's Blues*, its fourth album and first in three years.

After releasing their first two CDs — *The Punters* and *Said She Couldn't Dance*, both of which were independent productions, the group signed with Loggerhead Records in June 1998. The label then rereleased *Said She Couldn't Dance* and distributed their third CD, *Will You Wait*, establishing the group as a national force.

Radio play

Their tunes were heard all over local radio and the group was a hit with fans the world over. Since 2000, Foley and Moran have been involved in a number of projects, including the classic country cover band, The 8-Track Favourites, with Chris LeDrew, Barry Hillier and Sandy Morris. The two back up St. Bride's singer Joy Norman on occasion and were involved with the John Lennon



Patrick Moran (left) and Larry Foley are two of the original members of The Punters.

tribute show that played at the St. John's Arts and Culture Centre last spring. Foley's version of *Revolution* was a highlight of that show.

"I'm more influenced by the Beatles than anything else," says Foley, who often wears a T-shirt to gigs with New York City stenciled across the front, similar to a famous Lennon photo.

Beatle connection

The back cover of The Punters' new CD features a fiddle laying on a Vox amplifier similar to what the Beatles used during their heyday. That Beatle connection was also exemplified by accident in their second CD, *Said She Couldn't Dance*. Due to a manufacturing error, about a 100 copies of that album actually featured music from former Beatle Paul McCartney's *Flaming Pie* CD

instead of The Punters'.

Moran has also been busy during the hiatus. Along with the 8-Track Favourites, he hooked up with Shanneyganock to produce their successful CD *Scallywags* and performs with Chris Andrews and Mark Hiscock regularly under the name of The Government Rams. That group put out a CD called *Good Work ... If You Can Get It* in 2001, which became a favourite with traditional fans. Both Foley and Moran also perform numerous live gigs, either solo or in groups with various other artists.

This time around, the group is distributing the album with local traditional music label Avondale

Music. Going with Avondale was easy for the group because it was a label run by someone (Lyle Drake) they were both familiar with. "We didn't have to go to the mainland to talk to someone," Moran quips.

"It's a local company that knows the local market and there are no mysteries. Lyle is a great guy to work with," Foley says.

Foley and Moran produced the new record themselves — the first time

since their debut album. The glossily produced trad-rock sound of the past is not so present on the new CD, but it's a more intimate album, and the group says it more rewarding. "Everybody always told us that we

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"I'm more influenced by the Beatles than anything else."

— Larry Foley

should make an album that captures what we do live," Moran says. And with the new CD, there are a number of styles. The Beatles influence is ever present, but others are there too, from country to classic Newfoundlandia to 1950s music. The focus of the music is traditional, but those other influences add a unique facet to their sound.

Foley says they didn't have any "crazy, grandiose ideas" for this record. "All in all, we were always trying in the past to do that making-it thing and this time, we just wanted to make a simple and honest record for Newfoundlanders to buy and enjoy," Foley says.

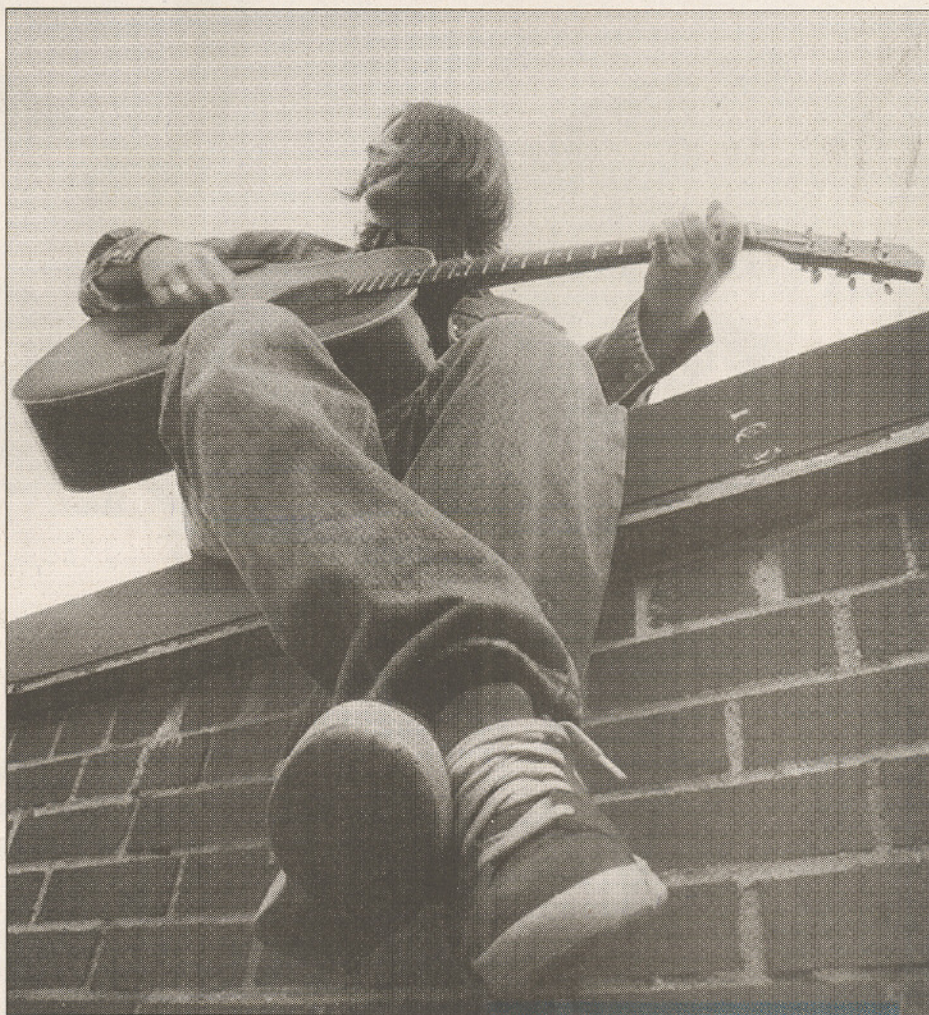
Screams Newfoundland

And it shows. The CD's cover photo has an old Martin guitar with the map and flag of the Republic of Newfoundland (borrowed from one of Foley's heroes, Ron Hynes) in its neck.

"It's something that screamed Newfoundlandia without bashing people over the head with it," Moran says. As for his description of the new album, he has a simple thought, "It's very us." *Fishermen's Blues* features only two new Foley compositions — the catchy *Close Your Eyes* and *She Ain't You*, as well as two Moran fiddle tunes moulded into medleys of traditional jigs.

As for the record's cover songs, they're quite diverse. The title track is a well-known 1989 Irish tune from The Waterboys. The song is special for them. "It's the first song we ever rehearsed," says Foley. "It's the only song that we played when we first started that we still play regularly." *Galway Girl* is by country troubadour Steve Earle but The Punters made it their own. "I've never even heard the original," says Moran.

Brown Eyed Handsome Man is a classic Chuck Berry tune while *All You Ever Do* was a 1990's smash for



Larry Foley is the lead singer of The Punters, who've been around since 1995. The group's most popular song is Heave Away.

The Mavericks.

The traditional element is also present on the new CD. *I Had But 50*

Cents is a long forgotten tune that Moran learned from his uncle; *Banks of Newfoundland* is a song that Foley says is one of his favourites and a song they both call a gem; and *Heave Away* remains a hugely popular song that previously appeared on *Said She Couldn't Dance*. The new version of *Heave Away* is still a dance-floor filler, with a little hint of the

Beatles' *Revolution* present in the opening.

The reason to re-record the song

"Me and Pat knew what we wanted to do with it, and we just went and did it."

— Larry Foley

was quite simple.

"People still look for it and the album it was previously on is a bit harder to find these days," Foley says. "We also wanted to give the song more justice than we did six years ago."

Good-vibe record

"This record is way more honest, way more simple, way more to the point," Foley says. "Me and Pat knew what we wanted to do with it, and we just went and did it. It's a friendly good-vibe record. There was no stress, no higher power suggesting

The focus of the music is traditional, but those other influences add a unique facet to their sound



The Punters' fourth album, *Fishermen's Blues*, is much more traditional than previous efforts.

we want you to do this or that. It was free and easy. Avondale gave us free creative control of the album and we give them full marks for that."

The new CD features friends and mates who are all talented local musicians. Former Punters bassist, Chris Batstone and former drummer George Morgan make an appearance.

Great camaraderie

Other musicians featured include Adam Staple (Drive), Barry Hillier (The 8-Track Favourites, Ron Hynes Band), Paul "Boomer" Stamp (WGB, Irish Descendants), Mark Neary (Persona, The Coast Guard) and Mark Hiscock on accordion. "The camaraderie was great there," Foley says. *Fishermen's Blues* is a much more traditional album than previous efforts.

The songs show the differing

range of music the group can perform, from country to traditional to straight out rock. There are three



Patrick Moran is one of the province's best fiddle players.

instrumental fiddle medleys present on the disc and the album is full of laid-back melodies along with the toe-tappers every Punter CD is known for.

Summer gigs

The band will continue to promote their new CD over the next little while and Foley and Moran will perform at various gigs throughout the summer, including the Southern Shore Shamrock Festival in Ferryland, the Festival of Flight in Gander and other events.

Meanwhile, the 8-Track Favorites will perform at the upcoming Newfoundland and Labrador Folk Festival and the George Street Festival. ▽

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