

## Nova Scotia: hip hop, swing, and a lot of class

Are these names familiar? Sarah MacLachlan, MacKeel, and Laura Smith. How about Big City Blues, Cool Blue Halo, Jamie Sparks, or Johnny Favourite? With over twenty artists featured in the showcases and at least as many nominated for awards, there is no doubt that Nova Scotians dominate the East Coast music industry.

Hopefully a quick survey will do them justice.

First there are the winners, a list headed by Ms. MacLachlan, with Best Video, SOCAN Songwriter, and Female Artist of the Year. Other awards captured by the province include Jamie Sparks for Dance/ Hip-Hop, Super Friendz for Alternative, and the Johnny Favourite Swing Orchestra for Best Jazz Artist.

"I'm overwhelmed," said Jamie Sparks. "Our CD's out in March, we're off to Vancouver, our video will be released and then we're off to the States."

"I think the ECMAs are great. They're a great way to expose Nova Scotia's talent, and the Maritimes, and a great venue to get your music heard."

If 1998 is any indication, the music heard at future ECMAs, particularly from the Nova Scotians, will be great indeed.



## Cape Breton - Rave on

Before Friday night's Cape Breton Rave, showcasing some of the hottest music of the island and certainly the best chili, I'd never heard of Capers having an invite-only party. It kind of seems sacrilegious.

The Rave, though, is becoming the most popular party of the awards weekend. Everyone wants an invitation. This year, it featured J.P. Cormier, Jennifer Roland, and the Godfather himself -- John Allen Cameron. Fiddles, jigs, beer, and great people. And they call it work.

Capers also achieved great success during the awards ceremony. Scott Macmillan shared the Instrumental Artist of the Year with Richard Wood. J.P. Cormier walked away with Roots/Traditional Vocal Artist and the best line of the night when he declared "Kiss my arse" on national television.

Other nominations went to David MacDonald for Classical Recording, the Barra MacNeils for Best Entertainer, and, of course, Natalie MacMaster for Best Single and Best Entertainer. With the 2000 awards in Sidney, Capers can be assured of becoming the new force in the East Coast scene.

## Spotlight - Jennifer Roland

When Jennifer Roland took the stage at the Cape Breton Rave, I was a little too busy to notice. I was trying to track down John Allen Cameron at the time. You know, scoop the man who's hard to get.

Big mistake. This woman is very, very good.

I was watching the crowd during the entire evening, interested in their reactions to the performers. They were certainly involved with the music; but, over all, I found them quite subdued. When Jennifer finished her first song, they were crowding the stage. By the end of her second one, they had broken out into reels and jigs. By her last song, they were literally pounding their feet in excitement.

No one had managed to get such a reaction. Not even the Godfather himself; and she is only 19.

"I really try to feel the emotion and energy of the crowd," offered Jennifer. "It always feels great because I'm doing what I love best."

Raised in Alder Point, Cape Breton, she is the youngest of ten children. By age three, she was picking out tunes on the piano. At six, she started tap dancing and, at nine, had begun her fiddle career. She uses the fiddle of the legendary Winston "Scotty" Fitzgerald, an heirloom she received from her father.

Her life certainly hasn't been easy. She was born with a severe cleft lip and palette and has endured more than 30 surgeries to correct the problem. Some of these operations have involved spending up to five hours a session in a dentist chair every second month. Her hearing, a crucial tool to any musician, was also affected.

It was at the IWK Hospital in Halifax that Jennifer had her first major performance. After spending much of her childhood there, she was eventually featured on an IWK telethon. She hasn't looked back since.

Her first album, *Dedication*, is a beautiful collection of traditional and contemporary fiddle music. Jennifer personally financed and coordinated every aspect of the project, from selection and composition of the tunes to working out arrangements. It is an incredible accomplishment and certainly ranks among some of the finest fiddle music I've ever heard.

Her grass-roots are apparent in every song she plays. Whether it is the haunting air of Jenny's Dream or the foot-stomping, beer-swillin' excitement of the 74th Highlanders, Jennifer never strays far from her home, or her listeners Celtic blood.

Keep an eye out for her.

"Rave entertainment is a great company that really helped alot. My first ECMA feels great because I'm really doing what I love best. This is my first album, and when you're starting off, you always need a bit of a push. I think it's going to pay off in that it's gotten me a little more exposure."

"I'm going to take this album and do what I can with it."