

Money behind the music A fan's point of view

The East Coast Music Awards have become a major event in the industry. Massive media attention, a nationally broadcasted gala, and extended showcases have made it one of the top music festivals in Canada. But not everyone is happy with what they've become.

Robert Cohn, founder of the organization, quit over the weekend in disgust. He was quoted as saying that the event would be better off "self-destructing" and starting from scratch. At different times during the weekend, dozens of the reporters present complained at the glitzy, Hollywood approach that this year's event had taken.

At times, I wasn't terribly impressed myself.

It was very hard to get a press pass to cover the awards. When the media coordinator found out that I represented a small-town university, she basically brushed us off, being more concerned with 'dailies.' I was often asked to give precedence to larger, national newspapers, even though they had very little to do with getting the 'stars' recognized in the first place.

More than once I found myself more concerned with running around, trying to catch some big name, instead of sitting back and listening to the music the event was designed to celebrate. What brought me back down to Earth was a conversation I had with a young lady from Pictou, Nova Scotia.

Heidi Campbell is the member of a newly-formed alternative band called *5 to 9*. I met her after she snuck in to another 'let's-get-the-media-drunk-so-they-feel-loved' reception. Word-for-word, here is what she had to say. If any of you are hopeful musicians, take notes.

"I believe that a lot of the industry that is here in Halifax right now have lost sight of the most important thing — that the players are here to showcase their music. I think that those guys and girls out there, sweating it out on the stage,

are really excited to see scouts and industry people interested in watching them. The fact that nobody is jammin' to the tunes, or getting into the music makes me feel sad.

You know, if a lot of the people who aren't going to be picked up saw people getting into the tunes or enjoying their shows, they'd probably keep on going. If they come here and people aren't into the music itself, it can be a real let down and a set back.

Sure, money has a lot to do with the ECMAs. It's an expensive show to put on, and the industry people don't want to sign people who are going to lose money on their label. But at the same time, if you ask everybody here why they chose to pursue their career, they would tell you it's for the love of the music. In the end, though, the musicians seem to forget that when it comes down to the almighty dollar. Hopefully, some of these bands will make it and get the money, but I don't think that's why any of these bands get involved in the first place.

Last night I was at a bar and talking to a few of the industry people. I went up to them and said 'You are all standing here with your hands across your chests. In a couple of years, I'm going to be one of you. I may not make a lot of money, and I may not be famous, but I'm going to have a lot of fun. You're in Halifax! This is a great city to party! You don't come and stand here against the wall. I don't care how big you are, you gotta have fun. It has to be for the love of what you are doing, or it's not worth it at all.'

Take Sarah MacLachlan, for example. She is one of my favourite artists. I really looked up to her, because she started out as a Halifax girl who was misguided and now she's doing really well for herself. I understand that she's in Japan, and on tour; but if it wasn't for the fans that liked her in her home town, and if it wasn't for people like me who bought her

first album saying 'Listen, you gotta hear this song,' she wouldn't have had the success she has now.

I think that a lot of people forget that. She should have played a solo gig at the Metro Centre or somewhere close where her fans could have seen it. It would what, cost her \$100,000 to take the time off. It sounds like a lot of money, but it's really a small proportion of her income for the tour. It's especially small when you realize she wouldn't have any if it wasn't for us.

It's a Maritime thing. This is about East Coast music. We're not in L.A. We're not supposed to shmooze and suck up to people. We're supposed to have fun. This is about the people who listen to the music and the people who play the music. There's so many things already out there for the 'big names.' It's the people who need the recognition who should be focused in the showcase. And who shares my opinion? All the little people who don't get to come to these events, who have to sneak in past the doorman like me.

Here's one. I met a guy the other night who was involved with the group Sandbox, and was really impressed with himself. I'm sure he's great at what he does, but that last thing I hear about Sandbox on the news was how much in debt they were after making two hit singles and a pretty good album.

The fact that there is debt, and that people have been taking advantage of small bands like them that aren't used to making any money at all makes me upset. Industry people shouldn't be so eager to take money from people. It shouldn't cost forty dollars to go see a live show. It's not about buying a CD, that's not what music is about. It's about individuals who express themselves, with music, to an audience who wants to listen and appreciate them. That's where music all started."

Well said, Heidi. And if Sarah ever comes home, I'll let her know you're pissed.



Heidi Campbell- 5to9



Natalie MacMaster and Bonhomme LeBlanc

"Flip Flop, and Fly"-Blues'till I die.

