

# Sappy Times

ROMANTICIZING THE RECENT PAST SINCE 2009

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# SATURDAY

*(Looking back on Friday)*

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## THEY SAID NOT TO GET OUR HOPES UP

but I have to be honest: I got them up. I tried not to but I did. I wanted to do as they suggested, to prep for a weekend of passing acquaintances and middling thrills, but instead I accidentally ended up hoping that these three days be filled with beautiful songs, sweet friends, huge jokes, savage dances, rare ales, rich spirits, cheap almond brittle and handmade bunting.

Like I said, it was an accident.

Sackville has changed a little, this past year. I got to town and there were at least two new coffee shops. There is a place selling tabouleh. I love tabouleh. There is a bowling alley, a new Ducky's, a place with pizza by the slice. There are also black balloons everywhere. There weren't black balloons in 2012. Did they just move in? I hope they're nice. The last thing

this place needs is mean black balloons.

Not far from some black balloons, Joel Plaskett opens SappyFest 8. At the moment this occurs, the mainstage tent isn't full. In fact it is mostly empty. But that's the point! That's the point. The sun hasn't even gone down yet. The sound-system isn't broken in. Many of us have only just gotten here. We're little fawns taking tentative steps. We're virgins. We're empty tents. Now is the moment when the change can begin. When the ordinary can be evacuated, letting the extraordinary in. Joel Plaskett and his band get up on a stage in the middle of the street, in a small town in New Brunswick, with songs about wrecking balls and summer dresses, and, listen - they start something.

It's denim-blue indie rock. It's like a fired arrow: clearly aimed, direct. It'll stick somewhere. When Plaskett plays a guitar solo it meanders like a kid

who's stalling outside his sweetheart's house, who's waiting dry-throated for his sweetheart to come out.

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### Difficulty Ratings for SappyFest 8 Carnival Games (from easiest to hardest):

- Swamp Magic - 3.5
- Saucer Attack - 7.9
- Shark Attack - 8.7
- Shot in the Dark - 9.1

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Someone's figured out how to use an industrial tar-pouring machine to make funk music. By "someone" I mean Pat Jordache. This is complicated cow-belled art-funk, congested pop, bassy juicy froot jam. It is all made of tar. The band's frontman puts out "a general call for



**FREE!**

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more sax." He means more saxophone, because the saxophone is awesome and the mix is low, but it's easy to imagine that he didn't say "sax" - that he said something else. Listen: he didn't say anything else. He said *sax*. Get your minds out of the gutter and then, when the music tells you to, put them back there.

Jordache jams work on the body's joints. Lateral movements, crisscrossing grooves: They insinuate into necks, shoulders, knees - that's where the dancing happens. There, and in some buried lobe of the brain, a slab of neurons dedicated to good intentions and piña colada.

It's more complicated dancing to Doldrums. There isn't the same simple magic of flexion, extension, contraction. Doldrums require commitment. The group's girlish frontman is skidding across a corner of the stage, writhing and magnetic, while a starfield flashes on and off. "Dream!" he sings. And the songs feel like they have the pacing of a dream: rave-pop that lurches and explodes, without reason. Either you dance like a pill-loosened maniac or you barely dance at all; but it's hard to do anything in-between.

Doldrums don't want our bobbing heads. They don't want our half-measures. They are flouncing and pounding and all they want is commitment.

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As cited on the previous page, SappyFest 8 has four carnival games. By winning all four, you become eligible for a magnificent *GRAND PRIZE*. Note this: as of Friday midnight, *NO ONE* has yet won all

four games. I repeat: *NO ONE*. This is a chance to be an MVP. This is a chance to be a hero. This is a chance to prove your messianic bona fides.

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Observed in the Bridge Street tent:

- three knights in cardboard armour, bearing a black flag;
- the smell of a skunk;
- the smell of "skunk";
- a guy I like to imagine was a pizza delivery man.

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Eucalyptus wedge themselves into the Black Duck Coffee House during Friday's wee hours, performing a very lovely cacophony. Never mind climate change - here is tempo change. Island jazz as free as summer breeze, with melting horns, eroding guitar-lines, pianos migrating north. There is a number called either "54321" or "12345," and it feels like a countdown to tropical fruit.

Meanwhile, while Karneef creeps raw & leonine across George's Fabulous Roadhouse, JFM fills the Legion with spasmodic fug. Crowd-members stagger in the darkness, either dancing or just trying to make their way through the morass. Later, a band called Rabbi Wolf explains that the program lied about their origins: they are Montrealers, not Ottawans. They are a trio in black bras, crop-tops and cowboy hats. They are neither lupine nor *tzadiks*; they play surfy guitar punk, sing songs about limp dicks and plum cake. Some kids start to hop and mosh and they are like capers jumping in a cheap student blender.

Friday's headliners are Chain & the Gang. "We're gonna learn about the lower depths," Ian Svenonius promises. His voice is hoarse as hell. Will someone give him a lozenge?

Anyway, they plumb. Here's spurred rhythm & blues, jackboot softshoe, from a band of five women and one man. They look best under red light - a haze of sin, blood, or an interrelated fantasy. Svenonius intones and yelps, flaps and jerks, sings and sings. He's part limber 16-year-old boy, part charismatic *eminence grise*. For breakfast, I'd guess, he eats Cheerios and cigarette butts.

Still, there's a strange vibe. Something's off in the balance of the group, a dynamic that's hard to read. Svenonius seems neither like the women's boss, their peer, nor their pet. Katie Alice Greer, Chain & the Gang's other singer, is belligerent and electric. She sings back-up, she calls and answers, she snaps and swings. When she takes the lead on a song, her short blonde buzzcut feels like a deliberate F.U. to Svenonius's black bouffant.

"Here's a song that sums up the nihilism of the Maritimes," Svenonius says. It's an amazing tune called "Why Not, Who Cares Anymore?" - two drummers leading a petulant shimmy. Later he introduces another song in a similar way: "this characterizes the efficiency of people in the Maritimes."

He's pandering, I guess, with references to Halifax, Mount Allison, First Nations. But pandering's allowed. Almost everything's allowed over low grooves like these - bass and tom, coo and yelp, dark gold riffs, while a middle-aged man shivers in a bright white suit. ☺