

Singing libertarian Jerry Jerry outlives myths

by Brendan Kelly

From the moment Jerry Woods renamed himself Jerry Jerry and formed the Sons of Rhythm Orchestra in Edmonton back in the mid-'80s, it was clear that he didn't have a lot in common with the usual garden-variety Canuck rock-types.

For starters, there was the political thing. Jerry had a song about socialism called "Bad Idea," and the hilarious send-up of knee-jerk leftism raised a few eyebrows in a rock community that was falling over itself jumping on every left/liberal bandwagon in sight. Jerry Jerry was booed in Ottawa when he played it. Looking back, he figures they just missed the humour in the song, but he's quick to add that he still thinks socialism is a bad idea.

"I'm a libertarian and always have been," says the Montreal-based singer, in an interview at the legendary Moe's snack bar across the street from the Forum. "Nobody has the right to enslave anybody else. In essence, you have the right to your life, your freedom, and your property, as long as you don't infringe on anybody else's. Government should have a very small place in the world."

A lot of the Jerry Jerry mythology revolved around the image of an inebriated crew of sloppy musicians whipping off inspired bar-room rock'n'roll in saloons across the country, and they certainly encouraged that line of thinking by naming their first independent LP *Road Gore: The Band That Drank Too Much*. It's a reputation that Jerry has been trying to live down ever since.

"There were a few significant incidents that people talk about a lot," says Jerry. "Deja Voodoo (a Montreal band) told everyone about the show we played with them where we drank six cases of beer at soundcheck. Between seven of us, we drank 14 cases of 12 and two bottles of



Jerry Jerry, live at McGill: Not a lot in common with the usual Canuck rock-types.

bourbon in a space of not very long. You do that and people talk. And rightly so: it's just tremendous excess. But, at the time, it was fun. When you're young, you can do stupid things. We were called the hardest-drinking band in Canada, which, of course, is not true. I know plenty of bands who drink more than we did then. They just didn't glorify it quite as much."

Several years and many hangovers later, the 31-year-old rocker admits that he and the current Sons of Rhythm — guitarist Arch Jones, drummer Alex MacSween, bassist Andy Jameson, saxophonist Patrick Fischer, and keyboard player Lenneman Pinkas — don't party with quite the same ferocity anymore.

For one thing, Jerry is married with three young children, and, if he's not on the road, he's likely to be stuck in his St. Henri apartment. But don't look for a bunch of John Lennon-style rock-daddy songs on the latest album (their third, and first for a major label). Instead, *Don't Mind if I Do* contains 14 slices of vintage

Jerry wit, wisdom, and roots-rock smarts. Jerry — with the help of longtime songwriting partner George Wall, a Montreal high school teacher and basketball coach — toasts country crooner Jimmy Reeves, has some fun at Elvis' expense, and, in the anthemic "Banner Day," perfectly captures the sort of day when everything seems to be going wrong. There's also a song about Mike Tyson and Robin Givens ("Superpowers"), and, in "The Ballad of John Card & The Booze Rookie," Jerry has the last word on Canadian rock culture when he quips: "It's hard to be cool when it's cold."

"They let us make the record we wanted, which cost considerably more than we told them it would," says Jerry of his move to Aquarius, a label better known for mainstream acts like April Wine and Sass Jordan. "It cost more than the other two albums put together and all of the money I spent personally in between the two."

Nevertheless, Jerry shrugs off the notion that he's suddenly become a rock p.57

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star — there was no multi-million-dollar advance, and Jerry and his Sons are back out on the road clocking up the mileage on the same old van that's weathered a few previous cross-country treks. But he happily admits that he isn't adverse to making a few bucks out of his trade.

“Commercial means to me that you can sell more records, and I'd love to sell records,” he says. “I think my style is pop music. It's just that — unfortunately — radio and the rest of the world doesn't see it that way....yet. But I think they will one day.”