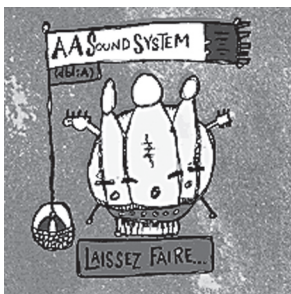


AA Sound System flex their invisible hands



AA Sound System

Laissez Faire
New Saskatchewan Records
www.aasoundsystem.com

JAMES CATTERALL
Arts & Entertainment Writer

Really, you can't pick this album up without smiling. AA Sound System's lovingly hand-drawn cover sports the trio blobman-style against a backdrop of sketched, dismantled instruments under a flag, which helpfully pronounces their name for you: "(dbl: A)."

The Edmonton-based trio's second album, *Laissez-Faire*, is an album full of solid, folk-inspired tunes. Recorded with guitar and drums right off the floor, the songs are given a very organic feel, and the lyrics themselves are rurally minded, encompassing down-to-earth themes and the inevitable combination of country and city lives. Brooks sighs into the mic, "I tried and I tried /can't try anymore /looking at the country from the 31st floor ..."

What's best about this album, though, is its simplistically brilliant melodies. And what beats that is its sincerity.

AA Sound System

With Leeroy Stagger & The Sinking Hearts, and Dub Vulture
Wednesday, 27 September at 9pm
Sidetrack Café

JAMES CATTERALL
Arts & Entertainment Writer

AA Sound System has the prairies in their pockets. Like true pioneers, the Edmonton-based roots-rock musicians have forged their way into the wilderness of the Canadian music scene, creating their own record company: New Saskatchewan Records.

"For our first record [*Lilly Plain ... You're Hardly Poor*], we didn't have any backing or anything, so basically it was my dad and my sister shelling out the money to produce the record," says Ayla Brook, AA Sound System's vocalist and guitarist.

"As a token to them, we called it New Saskatchewan Records. It's just our own little imprint for, you know, bits and pieces, and just to stamp our own name on it. It isn't a real record company ... It's a template to get started with things."

For the powerhouse trio, though, things have a lot more than started—they've exploded. Their debut album was number one on CJSR in 2004, and it managed to top charts on college radio nationwide.

However, the band remains humble in spite of their success. For a group having to follow up on an immensely successful first album, they've opposed cracking under pressure.

"I think the expectations were mostly on ourselves," Brook con-

fesses. "The response we got from the first record was quite a surprise. I mean, we got it all out to the radio right away, and our friend Jay Hanley [at CJSR], who's the music director, sort of put in a good word in for us. People liked [our music], so [CJSR] played it; that's the beautiful thing about campus radio and community radio. People are picking and choosing the stuff that they like, so to be played that often on a local station is a really good ego boost."

The trio met *Laissez Faire*'s producer, Danny Michel, at a music conference in Montréal, and before long, AA's drummer Marek Tyler had struck up an e-mail relationship with the Canadian folk favorite. Circumstances serendipitously aligned, and Michel was able to fly out to Saskatchewan to produce the album at the Brook farm.

"Having someone out there to really keep us focused and to put a little bit of polish on the songs, as far as arrangements go, was great," Brook says of Michel. "He made some good recommendations. His stamp is definitely on there, especially on some of the more pop songs on the record."

"We were recording, like, two songs a day, basically," Brooks continues. "The recording was really fast. We had to do it. The pressure was on. But also, being out in the bush, there wasn't any distraction. Nobody's cell-phone worked. Well, they did work, but you had to, like, climb on top of the roof and hold your hand in the air."

Ultimately, their heads-in-the-country, guitars-in-the-city mindsets



bore a pretty amazing fusion of an album. *Laissez Faire* saw more toys than their first album, with rhythm sections always live, all being played at the same time, while the musicians later dabbled extensively in electronic experimentation.

Touring around Canada is definitely in the cards for AA Sound System, but the group still has a ways to go before

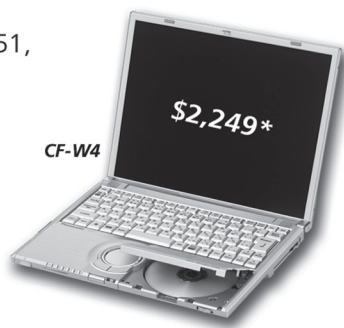
they can fully establish themselves as a Canadian music staple. If Brook was forced to compare these future endeavors to those of a famous political figure, though, he's certain he'd go for someone who's not afraid to overreach.

"[We'd be like] Tommy Douglas," Brook laughs. "Spreading good health across the land!"

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