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Go Away

An open letter to fad-seekers everywhere

By Martin Patriquin

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I have a message for anyone who, based on some recent high-profile music articles, might be planning a trip to Montreal. There isn't a polite way to put this, so I'll just come right out and say to all you scenesters, wanna-beats, hotshot musicians, ironic tie wearers, frat boys, pseudohippies, professional pot smokers, frustrated homosexuals and learned philosophy majors: stay home.

Let's review. A few months ago, Spin Magazine was gracious enough to dub Montreal "the Next Big Scene," in an article that was as reverential as it was inaccurate. True, this city is cheap, drunk and prone to dirty sex—but every Montrealer knows that the "vegetarian" Sala Rosa actually serves the sweatiest pork sausage this side of Spain. And don't rely on Spin's map of hot spots: you could easily end up partying in a bank, at a hardware store, or with Montreal's choicest hand-job artists.

The New York Times gamely followed suit with "Cold Fusion: Montreal's Explosive Music Scene," an article more condescending than inaccurate. Montreal, writer David Carr opined, was one of those "small places" where the next big thing happens—like Minneapolis (population 400,000), Athens, Georgia (100,000), Austin (700,000) and Omaha (400,000). "It's as if someone blows a whistle only those in the know can hear, and suddenly record executives and journalists are crawling all over what had previously been an obscure locale." How Montreal—an island-city of 1.8 million, with two main languages, four major universities and as many daily newspapers—can be considered *small* is a matter for another day.

What's important now is reversing the damage done by all this unwanted attention. As tried and true as it is, Montreal's beautiful balance of high unemployment, middling ambition and unflinching cynicism is a delicate one; it can be easily queered if too many people try to cash in on it. The symptoms won't be obvious—one too many local "it" bands, perhaps, or a few too many carloads of trucker-capped hipsters from Brooklyn coming here to get laid—but the effect will be irreversible. St. Laurent Boulevard will become intolerably quaint. References

to smoked meat and bagels will skyrocket. Cheap rent will be a wistful memory. French people will be made to feel like zoo animals, as will our poor, pawed-at strippers who endure the worst kind of off-island ignorance first-hand. In short, Montreal will become a clichéd, amusement-park version of itself.

It is time to let the cool-cat-come-latelies know what they'll have to endure if they move here. There's a flip side to our bohemian paradise that rears its patchouli-soaked underbelly every Sunday at something called the Tam Tams. Once popular only with hippies, this event has become a parading ground for yuppies, gippies and guppies, who apparently "celebrate" their love of Montreal by not showering for a few days. They coagulate at the base of Mount Royal, either drumming, dancing or pretending to do both.

Montreal also has Laval, its ugly, suburban cousin to the north—a virtual factory for everything that is tacky, fluorescent, G-stringed and low-riding. People from Laval are the antithesis of what was described in Spin and the Times. They drive onto the island on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights, in a convoy of Honda Civics painted the colours of the world's sluttiest peacocks, to dance badly and bark into their cell phones, usually at the same time.

"Yeah," I hear you say. "But I can still get laid, right?" Wrong. For all that libidinous mystique promised in the press, most French-Canadian women have developed a way-cool form of xenophobia that makes them distrustful of anyone with an out-of-province licence plate. It's been hard enough to get them to hang out with us English Montrealers; imagine their reaction when you tell them you're from the US. You might not get slapped, but you'll probably be blamed for a war or three. There's no respite if you're gay either. The kings and queens of the village will just feel sorry for you, being from Jesusland and all. The best you can hope for is pity sex.

Perhaps the funniest misconception perpetuated in the American press is the idea that our great bands and artists, from the Arcade Fire to Sam Roberts to the Dears, live a commune-like existence. "The next big pop movement" reads the Times piece "involves a coven of English speakers who have banded together up and down Boulevard St. Laurent in the Mile End neighborhood, filling lofts, community centers, bars and restaurants with sumptuous noise." Reality, bitch that it is, can be sumptuously different. Successful musicians make it big not only because of their talent, but because of their unbending egos. These guys don't get together over pints and talk about chord progressions. They can't stand one another, and are openly contemptuous of each others' successes.

If none of this keeps you away, consider this final, crappy thing about Montreal. As both Spin and the Times pointed out, being the Next Big Thing is an honour and a privilege that lasts all of fifteen minutes after it's been declared. As impressive as Montreal may be, it is destined to become another Seattle or Minneapolis. It would be a weepy thing if Montreal became the next Omaha, but I, for one, can't wait. At least, then, everyone will truly leave us

alone.

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