**Newfoundland's Mission?** - **Boston Globe -** 11/10/2001 **//** By Leslie Brokaw, Globe Correspondent

**THE ARTS** - When Adam Lewis first heard that the Newfoundland government was ushering a group of Canadian musicians to Boston to introduce them to agents and record labels, he was "terrified."

Who wouldn't be? As Lewis, president of the Boston-based music marketing firm Planetary Group, puts it, "I was sure they would be just horrible. I get nervous enough when lawyers call about bands - imagine when it's a bureaucrat telling you he's selling music." On the other hand, if the music is any good at all - and Lewis, for one, was pleasantly surprised when he listened to the advance CDs - what's not to love about a government that puts the same energies into promoting its cultural exports as it does its other homegrown businesses?

This past week, the teeny Canadian province of Newfoundland-Labrador spent $75,000 to bring four musical groups, three visual artists, and three film companies to Boston. While here, the 24 artists were escorted through individualized, jam-packed schedules of one-on-one meetings with management companies, nightclub booking agents, gallery curators, radio stations, and record companies. Termed a "cultural trade mission," the week was punctuated by a Wednesday night film screening and Thursday concert at The Big Easy.

"There are a lot of people watching us now," says Barry Snow of the province's Department of Industry, Trade, and Rural Development, who dreamed up the trip.

Canada's economic developers figure they can help sell art the way they help sell anything. Snow certainly talks the talk; he speaks of finding a "unique selling proposition" for each artist and calculating the "market pull" of their products. (He also says he was motivated by a simple idea: "Wouldn't it be cool?")

This week's trade mission was largely like any foreign trade mission: A government agency picked a regional industry with export potential, targeted a specific foreign country, invited participants to apply to attend, and then coordinated the several-day trip. Artists paid some of the costs, but the government is paying the bulk of the tab with the idea that the efforts will be an economic plus in the long term. (So-called "virtual trade missions" have also popped up between the United States and Canada, but face-to-face missions still hold strong; this was Newfoundland's ninth to New England in the past few years.)

The inclusion of musicians and artists appears to be unique. "It's the first time I've heard of something like this," says Lewis, whose Planetary Group was hired to set up what turned out to be 40 meetings in three days for the four musical acts.

The ready-made networking "has given us the opportunity to skip about two or three years of steps," acknowledges Billy Hickey, cofounder and lead singer of the pop band Timber, based in Newfoundland's far eastern city of St. John's. Everyone knows, he says, that most unsolicited CDs are tossed into a pile or directly into the trash. To get people from the likes of Boston's Don Law Company, WBCN, Club Passim, and event planning group Agent 0007 to pay attention to a bunch of unknown bands is huge.

Of course, Timber wants to break into the United States: even though the five-year-old group had songs on the short-lived American television shows "Time of Your Life" and "Grosse Pointe," and in 1999 and 2000 was named Newfoundland's Pop Rock Group of the Year, the band had never made it south of the border until this week. Boston is the closest major US city and still it's a two- to three-day drive: 10 hours to get across the island of Newfoundland, seven hours on a ferry, and another 15 hours from mainland Canada to Boston. For as long as the travel time is, Newfoundland bands may as well be in Latvia.

It's not surprising, then, that about a hundred artists, musicians, and filmmakers contacted the government to try to be included in the mission. The trip was publicized by the province's arts associations and through ads in local newspapers. "We wanted to end up with as close to an all-star team as we could," says Snow.

The musical acts are all standouts at home: singer/songwriter Barry Canning (think Billy Joel) won both Male Artist and Pop Rock Artist awards at last weekend's ceremony of the Music Industry Association of Newfoundland and Labrador; folk/pop group Rasa (think Natalie Merchant), won the New Artist title; and the Celtic-flavored rock group The Punters (think a traditional Irish group fronted by two hotties on violin and guitar) once represented Canada at Lincoln Center and was Newfoundland's Group of the Year in 2000.

Jeff Marshall is one of those in Boston who spent 45 minutes each with The Punters and Timber. Marshall owns Monolyth Records and for five years has booked Bill's Bar, a 300-capacity club on Lansdowne Street. "I'm pretty accessible, but I don't meet with just any band," he says. "If someone like Adam [Lewis] asks me, I'll do it. He knows what we do and wouldn't waste my time."

He told the Canadians what Bill's expects of the bands that play there - contact with local college radio, getting CDs into stores, a fan base that comes only from playing around town for a while.

Marshall also talked about money, which was the biggest bombshell. In Canada, guarantees of $1,000 to $3,000 a night are not uncommon. The average opening band at Bill's gets $50 to $150, says Marshall. "Our bands in Boston do it all the time - play for fifty bucks or pizza and dream of getting to $1,000 a show. The Canadian guys said they're willing to do it, which I think is gutsy. It's kind of backwards for them."

The musicians were prepared for the message. "Of course, you hope that someone falls in love with you and takes you by the hand and makes you famous," says Timber's Hickey. "But just to be making these first contacts is so amazing for us."

Not all the news was harsh. Christine Koch, one of the Canadian visual artists, sold four prints to the Fogg Art Museum during the course of her 16 meetings.

Count on more return visits from our neighbors to the north.

**SIDEBAR:
VISITING BANDS COVER ALL THEIR BASES**
What's a band to do when faced with an audience completely unfamiliar with its music? Cover another performer's song, of course. At Thursday night's showcase of Newfoundland bands, each band group took the tried-and-true cover-song route (along with their own material):

Singer/guitarist Barry Canning performed a mirror-image version of Billy Joel's "Piano Man."

Rasa, the folk/rock group, went with "The Letter," the Wayne Carson Thompson song made famous by The Box Tops and Joe Cocker.

Celtic-flavored dance band The Punters played a ska rendition of The Kinks' "Come Dancing."

Polished-pop band Timber snarled an upbeat "Seasons in the Sun," the Jacques Brel song that became a US hit in 1974 when it was recorded by Terry Jacks - a Canadian.s a very humbling thing. It sharpens your perspective.''
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