

The effect of polar magnetism and magnetic whales on cerebral people from the south, or:

## Northern madness

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"I AM into sound," Doug Pringle of The Poles is saying over Sunday brunch at Ben's delicatessen. "I was playing with the idea that whales have a higher acoustic awareness than humans. Whales hear in 3-D images with a little bit of visual input, which is almost opposite to human perception. Humans see in 3-D with a little bit of hearing input." \* \* \*

At an early Poles concert singer Michaele Jordana instructs the audience: "If anyone asks you what I'm doing here, just tell them I'm painting electromagnetic fields of energy in 3-D sound." \* \* \*

George Dean Higton writes in the New York Rocker after viewing The Poles at CBGBs: "The last 10 minutes of the show must be seen to be believed. In an electronic duel (male/female molecular clash), Jordana and Pringle literally blast apart the airwaves in the room with synthesizer guns, spewing invisible rays of atom-smashing pulse."

A moment of insight/inspiration glimpsed on an ice floe at the North Pole and set off by a taste of freshly-slaughtered whale flesh transformed Jordana from a promising, in the salon-art sense, painter first into a cautious performer and then into what Higton describes as "incredible Michaele Jordana, lead singer, riveting all eyes on stage. Such a tiger, such an exotic cutie. Whirling like a dervish, little girl tough, Cleopatra sexy, radar night eyes piercing . . ."

Jordana's paintings are in the National Gallery and the Canada Council permanent collections and her work has been shown at Toronto's prestigious Isaacs Gallery.

The out-of-the-gallery and onto-the-street attitude and their avant-garde credentials make The Poles what they say they are: "Pioneers of New Wave rock in Canada." The group which performed at the El Casino last week was founded last April, growing out of the collaboration of 60s rock survivor Pringle and Jordana.

It all began shortly after the two met on the set of a National Film Board feature *Icone*. Pringle whose instrumental group Syrinx pioneered the use of synthesizers in Canadian rock, scored the film in which Jordana was the star. She describes the production as a "Salvador Dali-type thing."

Pringle and Jordana continue their story, taking turns filling the gaps,



The Poles (left to right): Doug Pringle, Michaele Jordana, Rex Chainbelt, Ricky Swede, and Steve Goode.

making the same connections as they do on stage:

"We went to a remote island near Alert Bay, B.C. for a closer look at the whales. I took along a lot of sound gear and at first we'd play music into the water for the whales. After a while the actual buzz we felt from the animals, the emotional energy the whales were beaming at us, overshadowed everything."

"The whales sensed we were there and once, during a boat ride to the island which took four hours, there were about 30 of them swimming around us. It's thrilling! Exhilarating! It was an another level of consciousness. We felt we were playing with the whales on *their terms*. We were living and surviving by our own wits. But we weren't woody people, you know. We were having fun. We'd make these whale masks put them on and wade in the water. Whales communicate with each other with sliding-pitch sound, so a whale wouldn't need a piano . . . they use sounds between what we think of as musical notes. It's a very 'electronic' sound."

After returning to the city, the two continued to work separately but in adjoining studios. Infected by Polar Madness, Jordana and Pringle grew increasingly obsessed with a compulsion to venture out "as far into the primal as possible . . . I wanted to be Stone Age."

As Pringle wrote his rock opera

about whales in his studio, Jordana was in hers completing *Self-Portrait I Cried Tears Of Blood For The Power Man Wheels On The Hierarchy Of Being Dedicated Nulijuk*, a 16-foot long, eight-foot high canvas now in the National Gallery in Ottawa. Fashioned with an air-brush in an aggressively opalescent style, the work depicts an Eskimo celebration — natives in ceremonial clothes rejoice as they cut up Beluga whales for food.

Yielding to the primal impulse, the pair then set out for the North Pole where they found "a real sense of looking down at the world," felt the strongest cosmic pull on earth through an atmosphere only 80 miles thick and ate whale meat which "tastes like pure electricity."

To Jordana the polar landscape is "totally like space . . . I mean there's no trees, nothin'. You're out there all alone and all you can feel is Eternity. I mean, there's nothing else to feel. It's ancient. I'm relating to the Ancients. It's a ritual."

Returning once again to the "totally cerebral" reality of Toronto, the artists found themselves transformed by their Northern experience — "it was like the Garden of Eden . . . the people who live there are total survivors" — and transfixed by a shared vision, first expressed through Performance Art pieces. Jordana would re-enact being possessed by the spirit of Nulijuk (Eskimo spirit catcher of water creatures) against a backdrop of Eno-esque electronic music composed by Pringle. Two tons of ice blocks were used to evoke the mood.

The piece was performed at the University of Waterloo and at the University of Toronto. "After doing my dance-trance for a while I began to feel the urge to sing and then started to

relate words and music," says Jordana "Our music is primitive . . . we're minimal and we're real. When we started to meet punk rockers we realized they were into the same pulse that we learned about in the North. Survival. Except theirs was on the street level. With a rock group we could reach people."

Last spring, with the addition of Stevie Goode on bass, Ricky Swede on guitar and Rex Chainbelt, drums, The Poles were formed and played the college circuit and the Crash'n'Burn punk club in their city. Then the El Mocambo and last Dec. 28, the CBGBs in New York City where their performance moved the Variety reviewer to conclude that "The Poles obviously are one of Canada's better New Wave acts."

Pringle and Jordana are eagerly looking ahead to their return to CBGBs where they end a three-night engagement tonight.

"At CBGBs you have every kind of rock and roll fan: Bohemians, beatniks, hippies, glitter freaks, punks, new wave, post-new wave, street people. And they know how to Pogo. At El Casino someone threw beer at me. I stopped right there. We're not into that. It might be a chair the next time. We're defiant but we're not angry . . . we've gone past anger. I think, I hope, we can uplift the audience which should be part of the ritual."

"We're finishing the album after New York and the Colonial later this month. John Cale has heard our tapes and is interested in producing The Poles. But we want to hold on to our Canadian identity. Our northern image and images. You have to transcend the coldness of Canada, our emotional coldness. You can give in to it or you can break out of it . . ."