

# From art to sonic boom rock

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MONTREAL — Michaele Jordana of The Poles radiates an excitement like a high tension wire.

Her gaunt features are dominated by mascara lined eyes. She leans forward across the bed of the bland hotel room.

"I'm an artist. I'm going to die an artist. I'll die for what I believe in. When I'm 80 years old I'm still going to be out there fighting for what I want to express to the world."

It's between sets. The flat black painted interior of the club at the east end of St. Catherine St. in Montreal still shows its last incarnation as a disco club. Before that it was a country and western bar. Now, if its manager and Montreal are ready for it, the club may become a stopover for New Wave bands.

New York's CBGB's it ain't. Nobody's pogoeing here, no jumping up and down — this audience is too stiff to move.

For the present the Montreal audience still doesn't know what to expect or how to react. During the first set, faces around the club were set in bemused rigidity as the Toronto based Poles poured out a wall of explosive sound.

But at the front table, jammed up against the low stage, students burst out into an explosive chant: "POLES! POLES! POLES!"

They're New Wave converts.

The core of the Poles is Jordana and her partner Doug Pringle: she is the dervish Snow Queen of the North, he is concentrated calm personified behind his keyboards.

The Poles' three other musicians, ages 21 to 23, are veterans of the bar-room circuit: Ricky Swede on lead guitar, Steve Good on bass and Rex Chainbelt on drums. Before their recruitment they didn't know Punk from nothing.



Now they punch The Poles through the sound barrier—a torrent of rhythm that appears to leave most of the audience behind in a vacuum.

All eyes are on Jordana. Starved-thin frame in tiger-skin leotards and leather jacket, she prowls the stage in ragged, jerky movements, posturing, challenging.

## 'Look at yourselves'

The lyrics are almost lost except for the chorus lines, but Jordana's voice is rapid-fire strong, she's no pretender. The songs have titles like *Cannibal Kids* — introduced with "just look at yourselves, just look at the person your sitting with." — *Panic, Panic* and *Prime Time*.

Most are riveted to their seats. Something's happening and they have no choice but to ride it out.

Musically aggressive, and with the rhythmic power of a chain-reaction, New Wave's leading visionaries are refugees from the art world and the literary fringes.

Jordana too, is one of these. Already an established painter under the name of Michaele Berman, she left the medium driven by a need to reach and touch more people than she ever could through her painting.

At the same time she felt painters are no longer trying to extend the frontiers of art, but have become an elite clique.

"They haven't painted anything new in years," she exclaims. Painting has rigidified into a blue-chip market place where there is security in well worn themes. "They're still doing Jackson Pollocks, 20 years later."

"I'm a realist. My paintings are realistic — as realistic as I can make them. I started singing not out of a need to entertain, which is what a lot of the old rock and roll might be, but out of a real sense of energy."

"Maybe when I'm old, when I don't need to use up so much energy, I'll go back."

She sees her transition from painter to singer as a natural progression. "Real artists are like shamans.

*'I'm an artist. My paintings are realistic. I started singing out of a real sense of energy'*

Michaele Jordana of The Poles

Photo by David Rasmus

They're just one big nerve fibre that can sense things."

As a shaman she is at the very least right in step if not a little bit ahead of her times — a quality which has already made her a controversial figure over a series of canvasses on the slaughter of whales, one of which was bought by the National Art Gallery.

In the summer of 1976 Jordana and her partner Doug Pringle journeyed to the physical frontier of Canada's northlands. During a whale hunt with an Inuit hunter she entered a state of mind in which she identified with the legend of Nuliajuk, 'Mistress of the Waters'.

Literally starving — the hunt was for their food — she started taking on the persona of the hunted whale.

On their return to Toronto she tried to recreate the essence of the mystical experience in a series of performance works entitled *The Rites of Nuliajuk*.

"It was really bizarre. It involved aspects of theatre, a lot of music, slides, tape loops, and all kind of things like 2,000 pounds of ice."

The performance pieces were collaborations with Pringle, whose synthesizer work wove the cries and echoes of the arctic around their audiences.

While Jordana's and Pringle's performance-art was taking shape, Toronto's musical scene was fermenting with a new sense of excitement. The acts were getting tougher and meaner.

At the same time, encouraged and coached by Pringle, Jordana was turning to singing. "We did more and more tapes of me, and then I started doing it live."

Now, after six months of daily rehearsals The Poles already have half the material they need for an album and have a single out, *CN Tower*, on the Nimbus 9 label which was reactivated just for them.

The band's first performances were heavily Punk. "I would fall down whenever I felt like it. I never slashed myself or anything like that, but at the end my knees would be incredibly bruised."

But, she is careful to point out, she has a horror of violence.

At one performance in Toronto, someone threw a chair at her. She had been aware of "negative feelings from somewhere in the audience" and was ready for something to happen, but when it did she was emotionally shaken.