



Project Mantra, photo courtesy of Matt Vandervelde of ThirdEye Photography.

I NEVER MEANT TO START THIS FIRE

By Jon DeVarenes

Cutting through the thick mid-afternoon heat with a unique blend of musicians and sounds, Project Mantra brings its audience a refreshing performance on the day of our nation's birth. The band is led by Leigh Bursey, the front-man/lead vocalist/lead guitar/lyricist of the group, on piano and backup vocals is Audrey Cahoon, on bass is Alex Hodges, Matt Vanderbaaren or "Big Jube" beat-boxes for the group part time, and on drums is Justin Steacy. Brimming with energy, these five band-mates are ecstatic about the release of their first album in March of this year and are eager to be heard by new ears. Their album titled, *Fusion Manifesto*, is available in a variety of shops around town, but can also be purchased online at projectmantra.bandcamp.com, T-shirts and other merchandise may be purchased at their live shows, which are announced on their Facebook page at projectmantra.ca.

For the band's front-man and our city councillor, Leigh Bursey, this album is the culmination of a long time hobby and passion. Gaining notoriety in the past for his work with impoverished people in the community and his consistent support of the LGBTQ community, Bursey is jubilant knowing he will now be referred to as "the punk-rock councillor."

The album was recorded during live shows as the band wants listeners to hear what they feel is a more genuine experience

of their sound, and to encourage people to attend live music and become more involved within their local music scenes. As Leigh notes, "it is great to see local musicians performing covers, but there simply aren't enough locals creating something new." He continues, saying "everything is a manifesto" and this album represents the band's beliefs and their passion for music. Project Mantra's passions and efforts have fused into something manifest, avoiding obscurity and vaulting their hopes toward an opportunity to "keep doing this full-time".

Fusion Manifesto consists of a plethora of different styles and emphasizes the experimental play between the piano and the beat boxer which creates a deep and rich rhythm to counter balance the high register and coarse timbre produced by Leigh.

The album was put together after Leigh reunited with the band and rebuilt the project from the ground up, after focusing on his politics for a few years. Leigh says he is happy to be back in the punk rock scene he dearly missed.

Although he is turning his focus back towards his love of music, the impact and importance of his position in the city council shines through brightly in the proletariat arms seen front and centre on the album-cover. For Leigh the two are not entirely separate. This LP works to subvert and recognize the ills of society, the difficulties of

life, and maintain a hopeful message in light of these darkness's. Material for the album was conceived both before and after Leigh's journey into politics and the eccentric front-man enjoys combining his old perceptions and creations with the new.

With the release of this album, Leigh now wishes to spend as much time as possible standing onstage alongside friends who share his values and have their own stories to tell. Leigh makes a point of saying "I don't like to hold anyone back," extending his inclusive politics toward his band-mates he encourages them to stand in the spotlight and thereby encourages more variety and greater spirit in their live sets. Project Mantra has been securing more and more shows in the Brockville, Ottawa, Kingston, and most recently Toronto areas and a successful ten-show summer tour. In addition to these gigs the group has also participated in a clothing drive for the homeless, have performed in support of our local drag night at the Barley Mow, and have even played at such popular venues as Zaphod Beeblebrox in Ottawa.

This local band is a true inspiration to Brockville's music scene in their enthusiasm and innovation as they help breathe life into this small town. You can catch them on Friday, October 28th at the Barley Mow in Brockville as a feature act at an LGBTQ Halloween Costume Party event benefiting Brockville Pride. The event starts at 9pm and is just \$5. **LH**