

## Almost famous: Film looks back at the Seacoast's '90s music scene

By **Jeanné McCartin**

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They sat in cans in a closet — so to speak — for nearly a quarter century. No one was quite sure what to do with the scores of musical video hours tucked away, least of all Marc Dole, the man who took and directed them.

Dole, owner of Hatchling Studios, initially filmed regional bands as a young filmmaker trying to make his mark with music videos; it was the hot thing at the time. He completed a few, along with snippets. But much of the material sat and waited for inspiration, which came about a year ago with an offhanded comment.

Dole and fellow videographer Michael Venn were chatting about the Seacoast music scene, circa 1990s, and the film Dole shoot and stored.

It wasn't the first such conversation, says Venn. There had been some talk of a mockumentary. But during this latest conversation a listener simply suggested someone should do a documentary on that remarkable era.

Venn often describes it as a sort of a "Duh!" moment, and certainly the birth of "In Danger of Being Discovered," arguably the most anticipated film produced in this art rich community; the mirror that reflects back beauty.

"We were like 'that would be the smart thing to do,'" says Venn laughing. "We started to think about how special it was — the music scene. It's always been comparable to some of the great places, Chicago, New York, Seattle and Austin."

All of the other locations are so much larger, he adds. "We had a lot of talent in a very small area and we still do."

The '90s were a time when talented, distinct bands had major labels knocking, sold well, toured widely, and packed regional houses. There was broad support of the music scene, which was fodder for general conversation, titillating gossip and a great night out. Venues such as the Elvis Room and The Rosa were as renowned as the bands that played them.

"Experiencing it first hand, people really saw it as this special place," adds Venn.

A documentary is a tailor-made use of the film, but a daunting one. Between 1991 and 1996 Dole documented 10 full concert and numerous "snippets" of shows. Dole estimates he has 31 hours total of concert-time film, some with three to seven cameras running, bringing it to 50-plus.

There was no money for crew in those years, not unlike today, quips Dole. But more on that later, he adds. In the '90s folks worked for gas money. Some shows were put together with minimal equipment, others, such as Thanks To Gravity's loka concert, used \$100,000 worth of equipment.

Dole selected his subjects for performance, skill and musicianship.

"Being a filmmaker I also wanted the fun visuals to go with the songs. I was looking for who is most interesting of the bands. Choosy Moms had some great songs about Portsmouth, quirky and fun and I thought I could do some visual things with them," says Dole. "Fly Spinach Fly (whose guitarist Jon McCormack is also one of the film's producers), it just has amazing musicians and entertainers that could blow away the crowds."

"Discovered" is neither a lengthy music video nor an ode to the Seacoast scene. It's a film about "any town," with an incredible collection of talent that sits on the verge of national note, but is left perched at "possible."

"The film tells the story of the scene, but how 'anybody small town USA' has those dreams," says Venn. "It's an appealing story because everyone can relate or is intrigued by it."

In addition to the archival film, Venn and Dole fleshed out the story with 60 additional hours of interviews with people involved, musicians, fans, journalists, venue owners, DJs and music reviewers and six hours of new concerts.

"In Danger" is about bands that almost signed, chose not to or did so with major labels, but never hit the next step, and it unveils back-stories regarding circumstance and decisions and mistakes made.

"Thanks to Gravity was signed with Capitol. A lot of us never knew what happened after. We know they were signed by the president who was their rep, but they were shelved and then decided not to go on," says Venn. "Heck, they were working on a song for 'Good Will Hunting!' They were playing with bands on record compilations like Matchbox 20, Dave Matthews Band — reputable artists. ...; There are so many of those 'what if' moments."

What if Groovechild's Jeff Bibbo chose to sign that contract or if Fly Spinach Fly lasted two years longer and hit the trend it heralded? What if there was Internet?

"Sometimes I wonder if it's just because we're New Hampshire, a tiny little blip on the map producing this quality," says Venn. "You say New Hampshire and the clubs don't want to book you."

The film tells its story largely through four bands, Fly Spinach Fly, Thanks to Gravity, Groovechild, and Heavens to Murgatroid. But, says Venn, the scene was packed with authentic, diverse artists, neither contrived nor corporate manufactured, far too many to include.

Filmmaking also means business, and that means a capital required. Venn and Dole need to raise \$100,000, "or as much as we can," says Venn. There's marketing and festival fees, and "outside hard drives, "just a thousand bucks," says Dole.

"People always say just do it in your spare time. I have been for a year, but there's still things we need," says Dole.

A fundraiser is scheduled for The Music Hall on Friday, Jan. 27. It includes a screening of a 60-minute version of "In Danger" and two reunion performances by powerhouse bands, Thanks To Gravity and Groovechild. — Hear the long-suffering fans swoon.

The pair plan a DVD multi set featuring concerts and interviews that wouldn't fit in the film. It is hoped it too will raise needed funds.

While the era is gone, its legacy lives on say both Venn and Dole. Many of its artists stayed here, enriching the scene both as performers and teachers.

"It's like any other trade, the mentor and apprentices," says Dole. "They're continuing to pass it on."

"This story is still compelling. It's a great time to look back on. It pushed a lot of people and a lot happened," says Venn. "Many (1990) artists go on pursuing dreams in different levels and different fashions. It's really a great story about defining success and pursuing dreams."

Disclosure: Spotlight Editor J.L. Stevens is an associate producer for "In Danger of Being Discovered."

**"In Danger of Being Discovered," film and live performances by Groovechild and Thanks to Gravity**

**WHERE** The Music Hall, 28 Chestnut St., Portsmouth

**WHEN** Friday, Jan. 27, 7 p.m.

**COST** \$15.50

**CONTACT** [www.themusic hall.org](http://www.themusic hall.org), 436-2400, Info on "In Danger Of Being Discovered" (FB page: Portsmouth Music Documentary): <https://www.facebook.com/IDOBDMovie?ref=ts>