



# Coping With the Nine-to-One Grind

by Paul Leveck

It's a wet, dreary Monday afternoon. An ambulance pulls up in front of the Holiday Inn in downtown Toronto. A few heads turn—is it an emergency? Is someone hurt? The driver jumps out and swings the back doors open. The ambulance is packed to the roof with equipment. But not medical equipment; *musical* equipment.

Andy Parisien bought the ambulance at a public auction in 1975. At the time, he was half of a musical duo called Maze, which played in bars and clubs all over Ontario, and the ambulance proved to be the cheapest way of moving the equipment around. When the duo folded, Andy kept the ambulance, and the name Maze, and joined forces with guitarist Tony Crivaro, who was in the process of putting a four-piece group together. The resulting group, officially known as "Tony Crivaro And Maze," is about to begin a two-week engagement at the Top Of The Inn, a beautiful glass-enclosed room 27 stories above the heart of downtown Toronto.

The drummer of the group, Brian Galange, arrives just in time to help Andy get Big Bertha out of the ambulance. Big Bertha is the group's heaviest piece of artillery, Andy's 450-pound Hammond B3 organ. They manage to lower it gently to the ground, and then proceed to wheel it inside the building. A doorman gives them the bad news—the elevator goes no higher than the 26th floor—they're going to have to carry Big Bertha up a long, narrow flight of stairs under their own musclepower.

They decide to bring the organ up last. It takes them about half an hour to carry all the other equipment—drums, amplifiers, loudspeakers—to the elevator, up the stairs, and to the stage.

And then the moment of truth can be postponed no

longer. Brian takes off his shirt. Andy takes a couple of deep breaths, and positions himself at what will be the low end of the instrument. Brian takes the high end. Muscles tense up, and strain, and slowly, *very* slowly, Big Bertha inches her way up the stairs, one step at a time.

When they've safely reached the top of the stairs, both Andy and Brian are drenched in sweat. Their arms are trembling from the exertion. "At times like this, I sometimes get the urge to open up a nice quiet little shoe-repair shop," Andy quips, wiping the sweat out of his eyes.

After a brief rest, they begin setting up on the tiny stage. "All the stages we play on are too small," Brian says flatly. "Many of the rooms we play were originally booking duos, or even singles. They decide they want to bring in bigger groups, but nobody ever gets around to enlarging the stage."

It takes Andy and Brian an hour and a half to get fully set up. Then comes the testing of all the electrical equipment. The PA system is first to be checked. It's working fine. Andy then fires up the B3. Soon its big, full tones fill the empty room. Next to be checked is the Clavinet, a small keyboard instrument Andy rests atop the organ. Depending on how it's played, the Clavinet can sound a little like a harpsichord and a little like an electric guitar.

The original Maze duo was comprised of Andy on B3, plus a drummer. To make so basic an instrumentation feasible, Andy had to become proficient on the organ's bass ped-

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**Tradition: Mike Bosy, Bruce Douglas, Brad Johnston,**  
**Martha Douglas, Peter Occhipinti, Brian Gregory.**

as (to make up for the missing bass player) and on the lower keyboard manual with his left hand (to make up for the missing rhythm guitar player). As a result, he has become a virtual one-man band. Indeed, as he checks out his complete arsenal, tearing up and down the Clavinet with his right hand and backing himself with his left hand on the organ and thumping out a funky bass pattern on the pedals, it's hard to believe all this music is coming from only one person. But the real surprise comes when he tests his microphone, revealing that on top of all this, he also has an uncommonly rich and pleasant singing voice.

Brian puts the last of his cymbals in place, and improvises a short, fiery drum solo. Then, satisfied that all is as it should be, he begins collecting the discarded drum cases. Andy shuts off his keyboards, and collects some discarded cases and covers of his own. They leave the room, and emerge from the hotel just as a loud clap of thunder reverberates across the sky. Andy peers up at the dark clouds overhead. "We'll be playing to an empty room tonight," he grumbles under his breath.

In Brantford, Ontario, the rain comes down in sheets; but nevertheless, by 8:30 there are a couple of dozen people at Alexander's Tavern, where a group called Tradition has been booked for the week. "I was afraid we were going to be the only ones here," leader R. Bruce Douglas sighs with relief.

Tradition is a six-piece group that concentrates almost exclusively on top-40 material for its repertoire. Unlike Maze, which except for winter gigs in Florida stays based in Toronto, Tradition is happy to travel far and wide, to cities big and small.

"One of our favorite gigs is Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan," Bruce says. "Always a warm welcome for us there. And Tra-



**Tradition's Martha Douglas**



**Maze: Andy Parisien, Donna Lee Ann, Brian Galange, Tony Crivaro.**

cadie, New Brunswick. We also enjoy playing in Toronto, of course."

The group launches its first set with "Boogie Fever." Bruce has been playing professionally for 4½ years. Besides taking care of a lot of the group's vocals, he plays trumpet, sax, flute, and his first love, trombone. Several of the other players also double on brass instruments of one kind or another, which makes it easier for the group to deliver their top-40 material the way audiences expect to hear it. "A lot of musicians seem to look down their noses at the top-40 sound," Bruce says. "I don't. I feel comfortable with it."

"Boogie Fever" ends, and the audience applauds. Bruce introduces his wife, Martha, who sings "From New York To L.A."

Martha Douglas (nee Murray) has been with Tradition from the start. Besides singing, she occasionally plays trumpet and keyboards. Although the Douglasses spend nearly half the year away from their Kitchener home, they genuinely don't seem to mind living out of a suitcase. "I love seeing new places, meeting new people," Martha says. "It's an adventure."

Their one reservation about being on the road is the food. Both Bruce and Mike Bosy, the bass player and official 'baby of the group,' have developed cases of food poisoning from bad ham. Mike also had some trouble with mushrooms on one occasion. "You end up eating hot beef sandwiches everywhere you go," Martha says. "Pretty soon you can't stand the sight of a hot beef sandwich."

The group goes right into its next number, "The Things We Do For Love." By now there are several people up dancing.

"It's not always easy to get the audience involved in what we're doing," Bruce admits. "We've found that comedy is important. It helps a lot."

Tradition uses comedy in their second set, which they call their "show" set. It starts with guitarists Brian Gregory and Peter Occhipinti doing some vintage 50's tunes, accompanied by Mike on bass and Brad Johnston on drums. All four are dressed in appropriate 50's attire; their presentation is clearly inspired by ShaNaNa. They then bring on the "star," an Elvis-type (Bruce) whose hair is so greasy "the Arabs have been trying to get drilling rights to his head." Bruce does a

Presley impression, then brings on Martha, who sings "Johnny Angel." Bruce and Mike leave the stage, and return as "Wanda" and "Tina," two preposterously buxom young ladies who ask for volunteers from the audience to help them learn all the steps of "The Locomotion," as described in the lyrics of the song. Next comes "The Leader Of The Pack," in which drummer Brad runs madly around the room with a set of handlebars in his hands, and then loses control and crashes in a heap on stage. The show set ends with a jungle sequence—a gorilla in longjohns plays sax while explorer Bruce teaches the audience how to avoid cannibals.

During the break after the show set, Bruce admits that he isn't too pleased with the audience's reaction. "I'm tempted to try doing the show after *two* dance sets tomorrow night," he says. "Maybe it'll warm the people up more."



Tony Crivaro arrives at the Top Of The Inn shortly before 9 o'clock. The rest of Maze—Andy, Brian, and Donna Lee Ann, the singer—are already there, sitting at a table with friends. Tony produces an old copy of the *Toronto Star*, dated March 2, 1968, which features a story about Tony's original group, The Showtoppers, and the efforts they were making to get a booking in Las Vegas. Everyone laughs at how young and skinny Tony looks in the pictures that accompany the story. (Tony's group did play Las Vegas, for six months, beginning in August, 1968. That engagement helped put the group's agent, Bud Matton, on the map. Today the Matton agency is the largest in Canada).

"I was with The Showtoppers for seven years," Tony recalls. "Until 1975. I left the group because I wanted to do less travelling. I wanted to settle in Toronto and raise a family." It was then that he met Andy and the other members of Maze.

The four musicians take their places on stage, and kick off their first set with "Feel Like Makin' Love."

About one fifth of the audience is comprised of Maze "regulars"—loyal fans that follow the group around wherever it's booked in Toronto. Among the others, the people hearing the group for the first time, there's a noticeable amount of head-turning when Donna begins to sing. People aren't expecting such a dynamic, electrifying voice to come from a girl barely out of her teens.

Curiously, though, Donna has been performing in public longer than anyone else in the group. "I first considered music as a career when I was four years old," she says. And then a giggle: "I know it sounds silly, but it's *true*. I attended an All-Night Gospel Sing at Massey Hall, and it really got to me. I remember, Mr. Lossing [who organized the event] pointed to the stage and asked me if I was ever going to be on it. I said yes, without even stopping to think about it." She kept her word, and performed in Massey Hall in 1968 with a female trio called The Trilites.

When the first number ends, Tony chats with the audience, and then introduces the next song, "You Don't Have To Be A Star". The number begins with both Donna and Tony playing flute; Andy and Donna handle the vocals.

"We've always tried to be a versatile group," Tony explains. "Our repertoire is large enough to accommodate just about any kind of room. Some clubs want tunes like "Girl From Ipanema," that sort of thing; others want disco, western, you name it. We try to give the audience whatever it is they want to hear."

"The hard part is learning new material," Andy says. "More and more clubs won't allow the groups to stay on after

hours to practice. There are some exceptions, thank heavens, such as the Howard Johnson clubs."

"It's becoming a problem," Tony agrees. "I'd say about 80% of the clubs no longer allow practices after hours. The club owners want their groups to play current material, but they're almost making it impossible."

After three of four numbers, the dance floor is becoming crowded. Donna sings "Loving You", and a curious thing happens. A hush falls over the room. Conversations grind to a halt. The people are *listening*, a rare occurrence in any room where alcohol is served. They're spellbound by Donna's emotional delivery of the lyrics, and by the incredible 5-octave range of her voice. When the song ends, the applause is impressive.

"A funny thing happened on our first trip to Florida," Donna says. "One night after the job, I showed Andy some poems I'd written years earlier, with the idea of setting them to music some day, and we tried improvising some chord patterns and melodies, and fitting them to the words. It *worked*."

It worked indeed—on most nights their original songs are the ones the audience responds to most warmly. Don Gepert, a Toronto record producer, heard a crude tape of a few of them, and was impressed. He offered to make a professional studio demo recording, at his expense, if Andy and Donna would agree to let him produce their future records. They agreed, and have already begun recording some of the songs.

"It's exciting," Donna says with a smile. "Things really seem to be falling into place for us."

Maze has been booked for a return engagement at the Top Of The Inn for the entire month of November.



Tradition are wrapping up their last set in Brantford. They're playing a medley of hits by K. C. and the Sunshine Band. Bruce Douglas plays a long, funky sax solo in "That's The Way I Like It" that brings back memories of the good old days of early rock n' roll, when saxes were more predominant than guitars.

"Some people get into music with dreams of getting rich," Bruce says. "What they don't realize is that when you're on the road, paying 15 or 20 bucks a day for restaurant meals, and buying drinks at the club between sets, spending in all something like 25 bucks a day, times 5 days—that's 125 bucks out of your salary for the week right there. That's not even counting the other expenses for equipment and transportation, stuff like that. Doesn't always leave you much."

The group plays "Evergreen," the last number of the night. Bruce plays a lovely, melancholy trumpet line in harmony with Martha's voice.

"I would say there are probably four main categories of people who get into this kind of music for a living," Bruce says. "First there are the professionals, who take their music seriously. Then there are those who really can't do anything else; they know a couple of fancy licks on their instrument, and that's it. Then you've got what I call the dopers, the ones who fall into the booze trap, or the women trap, or the dope trap. And finally you've got the real losers, the ones with no talent and no ambition, who are in it for all the wrong reasons."

Both Maze and Tradition clearly fit into the first category.

"Music isn't always the easiest living in the world," Andy Parisien admits. "But let's face it—when you're a musician, it's the only life." ■