

Story & photos by Sean Pratt

A SMALL, enthusiastic group converges in front of the stage to dance or get a better view of tonight's show. Off to the right, groupies sing along to the tunes. The faithful know when the band misses a beat or messes up a line.

Beyond the dance floor of this campus bar sit another 150 people scattered among the rows of half-full tables. They are talking and drinking, occasionally taking in the performance.

It's Saturday night and The Minnow has another gig in Regina. This time the band is warming up for close friends and Juno award winners, the Waltons.

John Boesch has been playing acoustic guitar and providing back-up vocals since he co-founded the band three years ago. He considers it more than a sideline; it's his other career. But farming is still his bread and butter, his "real career."

"Farmer," as his bandmates have dubbed him, is something of a novelty in the rock 'n' roll world. The band likes to play up Boesch's farm background at shows.

"We always tell the crowd he's a farmer from Gray, Sask.," said guitarist Mike Kurz. "People eat it up."

Boesch said he feels he is leading a double life. He lives in the city, playing for a rock 'n' roll band at night, and spends his days working on the family farm a half hour southeast of Regina. It is a specialty crop farm of about 4,000 acres. This year they seeded lentils, canary seed and oats.

Boesch is a shareholder in GWL Boesch Farm Inc., along with the other members of his family. He has been a landowner for a while, but just got back into farming a few years ago. He works with his father, Lawrence, and his brother, Paul.

The 24-year-old is not the kind of farmer you would find sitting at coffee row. He has an earring in each ear, long dirty-blond hair tucked into a brimless ball cap, a beard, wrap-around shades and a tattoo on his right shoulder of a cow skull chewing on a wheat sheaf. But he knows farming and seems to love it.

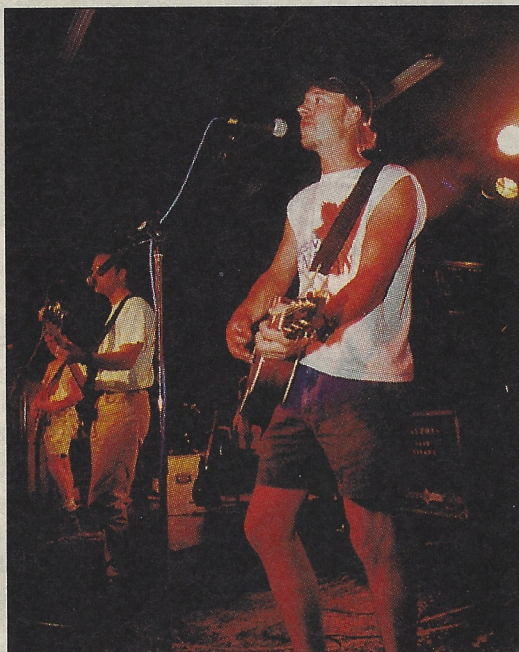
"I enjoy the drive out to the farm in the morning more than I enjoy the

drive back," he said.

Boesch likes getting away from everyone and everything, spending some tranquil hours behind the wheel of his Versatile 875 tractor. The radio stays off in the tractor. Instead, Boesch runs through songs in his head or plays a tune on his harmonica. When there is a lull in the work he picks up the black acoustic guitar that sits in the shop and fiddles around with song arrangements.

Such moments where his two careers intertwine are rare. When they do, he might have to adjust one schedule to fit another. If it is a matter of missing rehearsal, farming takes priority.

"He has to seed for a week solid," said



John Boesch grows canary seed and sings like a minnow.

bandmate Kurz. "And then when it comes to harvest time he has to work non-stop, so we might not see him for those couple of weeks."

But if it's a conflict between playing a show and farming, the band wins out.

"PEOPLE I work with on the farm understand that when it's time to go play, it's time to go play," Boesch said. "And I'm going to do it."

Paul Boesch said his brother is learning how to juggle his schedules. "All in all it seems to work out OK. There hasn't been too many times when we've been pulling our hair out wondering where he is, but that has happened."

Boesch got into music at an early age. When he was seven he was enrolled in piano theory. But he didn't develop a real love for music until high school. His music teacher got him interested in a variety of instruments and encouraged him to sing at a benefit concert, which led to the formation of his first band, a jazz combo group.

He also met Grant Roland in high school and the two eventually formed a band that would become The Minnow when drummer Clark Pelat and Kurz joined at Christmas 1993. Roland is the lead vocalist and main songwriter.

The Minnow has developed a decent following in Saskatchewan. Its inaugural CD sold 1,000 copies in the province. Boesch describes the band's sound as "acoustic pop with a driving edge." Primarily a bar band, it has also played larger gigs such as the Saskatchewan Roughrider Rock 'n' Roll Picnic and Regina's Flatlands Music Festival in Victoria Park, which attracted 8,500 people.

What started out as a sideline is gradually becoming bigger. The Minnow has a video that aired on MuchMusic, had one of their songs picked as the theme for CBC television's *Utopia Cafe* and will soon be the focus of a half-hour episode of *Prairie Roadhouse*, a CBC television program that showcases Saskatchewan talent.

"At the start it was fun to do," Boesch said. "It's still fun to do, but now there are more feelings that it could go further. Or we hope that it will."

Band members are tossing around the idea of getting a manager to book out-of-province tours and take over promotional duties. They are also considering a follow-up CD next summer.

But for now it is too soon to start thinking about quitting their day jobs. And Boesch doesn't foresee getting out of farming even if the band begins to take off. He wants to maintain the balance of his dual life.

"I enjoy working on the farm. I enjoy being out here with my family. And I also enjoy being with my other family in the band." ♦