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ex, drugs, depravity... if you regard these as essential staples for any rocker, then you'll think Our Lady Peace frontman Raine Maida about as likely to satisfy as a eunuch at a nymphomaniacs' convention.

"I'm definitely an introverted person, who prefers to keep his own company much of the time, especially on the road. When we came to Britain to support the Stereophonics in December, the first show was in Glasgow. When our tour bus pulled up outside the venue [the SECC], everybody else was asleep. So, as there was nothing else to do, I found a quiet room, and I sat in there and played my acoustic guitar for three hours. That was by far the best part of my day."

Get the picture? We are not talking about somebody for whom debauchery is a second skin, but a thoughtful, intense, sensitive soul. Perhaps the sort who really shouldn't be exposed to the snakepit of touring. However, Maida seems to be coping well with the rigours of the road. He has to, as Canadians Our Lady Peace are

currently spending much of their time hitting the freeways and highways.

Maida and his cohorts – guitarist Mike Turner, bassist Duncan Coutts, drummer Jeremy Taggart and touring keyboardist Jamie Edwards – are suddenly very much in demand. Their third album, the quirkily titled 'Happiness...Is Not A Fish You Can Catch' (following on from 1994's 'Naveed' debut and 1997's 'Clumsy'), is expected to break them as a major force in North America, and is starting to finally gain the band serious attention in Britain and Europe.

How to describe them? Imagine Live, U2, Pearl Jam and you'll get damn close to sniffing the coffee.

"I grew up listening to early U2," says Maida. "I was also a heavy Stones and Springsteen fan for about six months, but U2 delivered music that made the hairs on my neck stand up. That feeling is something that, as a singer and songwriter, I want to convey every time I write something. I always wanted to be a performer so that I could express myself. Standing onstage I can shout my lyrics at people without preaching. It's a fascinating place

to be. I don't claim to be different from anyone else, or to have more difficult problems than people in the audience. And I'm not trying to tell people how to run their lives. Quite the opposite. I want people to think for themselves.

"I'm an individual. I don't want to be told what to do or think, and neither should you. I don't accept someone else's stupid concept about how I should or should not be. That's why I watch very little TV, because that dilutes your own opinion and individuality. I've always felt like that, even as a child I knew I wanted to challenge things. I got kicked out of high school, because I was in a band and refused to cut my hair. It was so silly. Why would you want to stop someone being educated because of the length of their hair? I felt it wasn't important to stay in high school and adopt all those stupid rules and regulations."

Maida grew up in Toronto, in a family where music consisted of Elvis, Elvis... with a side order of more Elvis.

"I don't come from a really creative background," he admits. "The only records my dad would ever play were