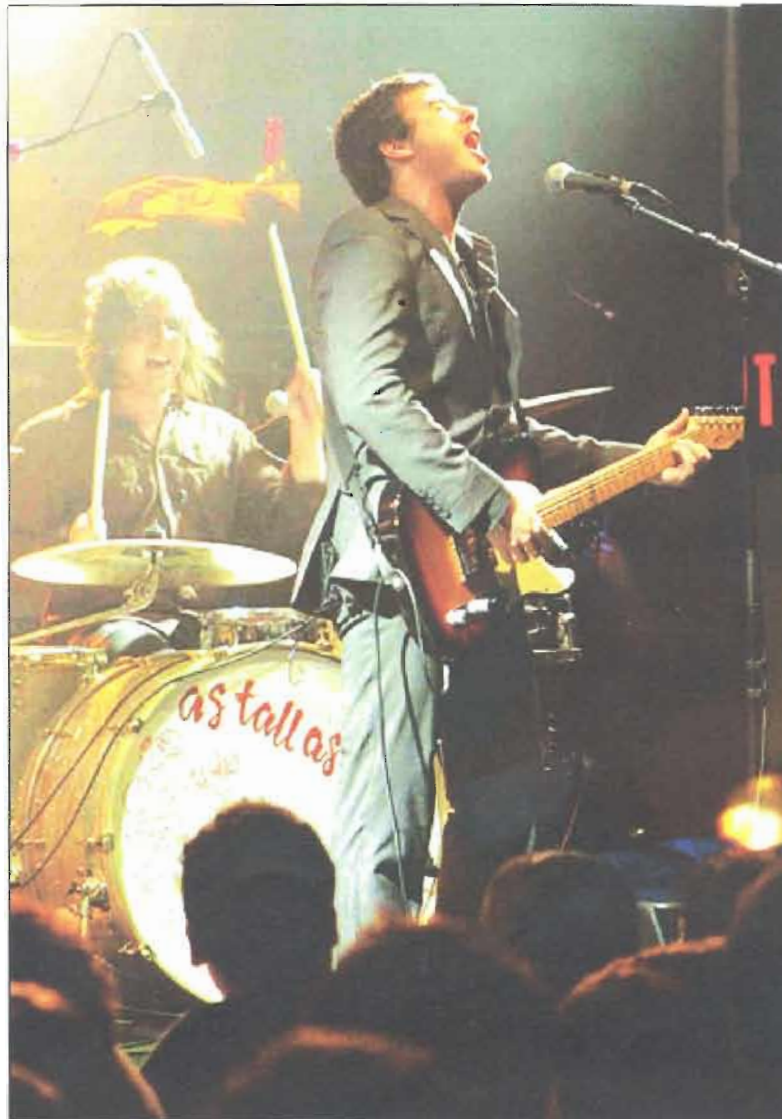


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CMJ MUSIC MARATHON

Hunting a lion's share of fame



NEWSDAY PHOTO / ARI MINTZ

As Tall As Lions, featuring Massapequa Park native Dan Nigro, roars at the Highline Ballroom Friday — part of the 27th CMJ Music Marathon.

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Before a packed crowd at The Highline Ballroom on Friday night, singer Dan Nigro said a gutsy thing: "We're As Tall as Lions, and we're from Long Island, New York."

The statement was mere fact, but gutsy for this reason: The show was part of last week's 27th CMJ Music Marathon, a five-day festival in which more than 1,000 bands from fashionable locales such as France, Sweden and the United Kingdom played at more than 50 venues in New York City.

For musicians, the goal was to generate buzz, build cachet and convince at least some of the estimated 11,000 industry insiders in attendance that you're making waves. Among the hottest tickets were Justice, a French DJ duo; M.I.A., a revolutionary rapper from London with Sri Lankan roots; the raunchy hip-hoppers Spank Rock, from Baltimore; and the popular indie band Spoon, from the oh-so-indie city of Austin, Texas. As for Long Island — well, it's not always on the maps of tastemakers.

So how did As Tall As Lions make out? In short, the band was a revelation.

In the past its ambitions

often outreached its abilities, resulting in slightly wobbly shows. But the musicians have been touring relentlessly since last summer's release of "As Tall As Lions" (East West), and on Friday they played with confidence and a dash of style, running through a dynamic, 50-minute set of ethereal melodies, quiet interludes and explosive crescendos.

Nigro's falsetto soared on romantic numbers such as "Ghosts of York" while guitarist Saen Fitzgerald and touring keyboard player Rob Parr provided swirling underpinnings. The rhythm section — bassist Julio Tavarez and drummer Cliff Sarcona — turned even the gentlest songs into knockouts. The band also tried out a new, unreleased number, "Blacked Out But Not Gone," with an unusually bluesy feel. And by the show's end, another sound was mixing with the music: loud screams from an excited crowd.

Other Long Island groups also ran the music marathon. Tuesday at Mercury Lounge, singer Jesse Lacey and guitarist

Vin Accardi of Brand New played a semi-acoustic set of old favorites ("The Boy Who Blocked His Own Shot") and recent material ("Degausser"). Lacey, alone, ended with an impassioned cover of Neutral Milk Hotel's "Oh Comely."

Next came Aeroplane Pageant, a five-piece built around shimmering guitars and the in-

triguingly clipped vocals of Brian Kelly. Later that night at a miniscule Tribeca venue called The Tank, the band Higgins charmed its audience with curlicue pop tunes. On Thursday at Crash Mansion, Night Kills The Day hammered out dark rock on an even darker stage (it was unlit). The singer, Bayville native Luke Brian, was so determined to energize the crowd that he jumped offstage and forcibly uncrossed the arms of an onlooker.

But while the Long Island bands were busy rocking, other acts were dancing. At the brand-new venue Terminal 5 on Friday, M.I.A. overcame poor sound (a faulty microphone) with a set of whomping, bottom-heavy hip-hop, much of it from her new album "Kala" (XL / Interscope). Fittingly, the place felt like a jungle, partly because the crowd was soaked with sweat due to poor ventilation, and partly because it was happily mimicking M.I.A.'s exotic yelps and yodels note for note.

The next night at the same venue offered a more urban vibe. The Australian trio Midnight Juggernauts played organic dance-rock with drums, bass and synthesizers, warming up the crowd for the headliners, the two DJs known as Justice.

Whether concocting gritty tracks such as "Genesis" or frothier tunes like "D.A.N.C.E.," Gaspard Augé and Xavier de Rosnay spun discs and twisted knobs as DJs do, but also behaved like musicians in a band. Judging by their body language, Augé handled the