Loonies and tunes: Lauren Metter and Dimitri Kouri of 18% Productions embark on a quest, facing more than 650 bands playing in over 50 venues all across Toronto. Bringing you clips and stories about the best new sounds from all over the world, it is now time to explore, discover, and party with some Canadians.

10 hours, 2,450 Canada jokes, and 167-feet of Niagara Falls later and we’re driving into Toronto for NXNE. Dimitri is playing banjo in the passenger seat while I’m singing about why Canadians like observation towers so much. I’m wearing aviators and calling Dimitri my Attorney.

We make it to the Hyatt Regency, the press headquarters of the festival exactly 15 minutes before deadline to sign in. I hop out, sprint in, and get our press passes while Dimitri circles the block. Waiting for him on the corner, I’m greeted by a pleasant hipster Canadian boy who, without further unnecessary introduction, leads me across the street to the “place where everyone smokes cigarettes” because he doesn’t have a lighter on him. Canadian cig smokers are in fact overly enthusiastic to share lighters, though I appreciate it.

“Everyone is so nice! I feel so safe here,” Dimitri says as I jump back into the car and immediately drop all of the band flyers and stickers I haven’t balanced correctly all over the floor.

Little did we know that on a night when Boston is destined to take the Stanley Cup from Vancouver, not all Canadians are very nice.

Anyhow, we had a couple beers with a 90% insane producer from London UK Records named Maxwell. He was trying to explain some metaphysical concept that they’re integrating into the music video they filmed at Stonehenge this year—but every point was made moot by the fact that he called Psilocybin, THC, and Peyote “tools” for interpreting the energy within, for understanding the subconscious mind. No shit, Sherlock—when you’re tripping, everything is a metaphysical experience.
I had had about enough when I snapped back to earth after ruminating about Canada and Maxwell (if that's really his name) was holding Dimitri's arm up and saying "Be strong, Janet" while Dimitri looked at me with pleading eyes.

We were sitting on the outside patio of the Rivoli, a hip little bar with walls of local canvases, dimly lit with lanterns and white Christmas lights...and full to capacity by 10 p.m. with expectantly tapping converses. Turns out we stumbled upon the indie-rock mecca, the hot spot of NXNE Wednesday night.

What a lovely hidden gem it was.

10 pm brought us The Meligrove Band, who played a whole set of Ramones songs complete with incessant fist-pumping, spastic movements, and the best kind of energy—like a poppy punk-rock show in your garage on your 16th birthday. They're straight from Toronto and apparently legendary for their live shows, and I agree: Meligrove made the whole crowd want to do anything but be sedated; the head-bobbing was so goddamn contagious. Where the hell was my guitar?! I know how to play power chords!

Their usual sound is similar to what would have occurred if the rapture was real and Tokyo Police Club and Born Ruffians had to repopulate the world afterward. My new Canadian friend with snake bites in the front row said that The Meligrove Band just came out with a DVD where all the bands they've been friends with throughout their 10+ year career talk about playing shows with them and how much respect they have for these veterans.

"They've been around for so long and are really good but nobody gives a shit," the snake-bite kid tells me. "That's why NXNE is so great, it's a local showcase."

My new photographer friend from the Torontoist, Corbin Smith, agrees: "I'll go to a show and see a band between two bands I know that's really good.

And it will be someone I haven't heard of right from my own backyard."

The Paint Movement at 11 pm was insane—but unlike Maxwell, in the best possible way. The music was so dense and full, which had a lot to do with the three guitarists, two sax players, drummer, and the foxy blonde keyboardist in a tight green dress... $3 + 2 + 1 + 1 = ...$? Yes, a 7-man ensemble with the most creative funky jams I've heard in a very long time.
Their strength comes from combining the organic sounds of woodwinds and traditional chord progressions with pulsing electronic boops and beeps. I mean, when the girl played synthy notes while laughing along with her sax player, I had no idea how they made it work—but they did, much like a more mature, soulful version of Architecture in Helsinki. And it's new and interesting, which is refreshing at a festival of 650+ bands, when "indie" can become one monotonous chord progression.

Library Voices at midnight are the 9-piece indie-pop people from Regina Canada that you could tell everyone in the packed venue was looking forward to. Like seeing a local punk band play in their hometown, the set was a giant sing-along. Without a doubt, they had the best stage presence of the night, standing on their heads, jumping off amps, and leaning over the screaming crowd. And on top of everything, they gave a shout-out to Kafka in one of their songs, my nerdy English-major dream-come-true.

So far, my progression of thoughts for each band at NXNE has been my favorite kind when stumbling upon new shows and exploring festivals: "Who are these people?" ... "This is actually pretty good..." "Wait, this is good too" ... "This song is even more fucking awesome!" ... and then it all makes sense: NXNE is way too much fun.

Just when we thought that Canada couldn’t be any more perfect, we returned to our car to find the back window was smashed and my brand new Macbook Pro stolen. According to the Toronto Police (who are mysteriously not open from 1 am to 7 am, though I imagine these are the peak hours of crime ... everywhere) it was probably an act of rage done by a sour Canuck.

Thankfully, stealing a laptop does not change the fact that Boston is better than Vancouver at hockey. SOOORY.

Check back tomorrow for updates from Day II and Day III at NXNE.