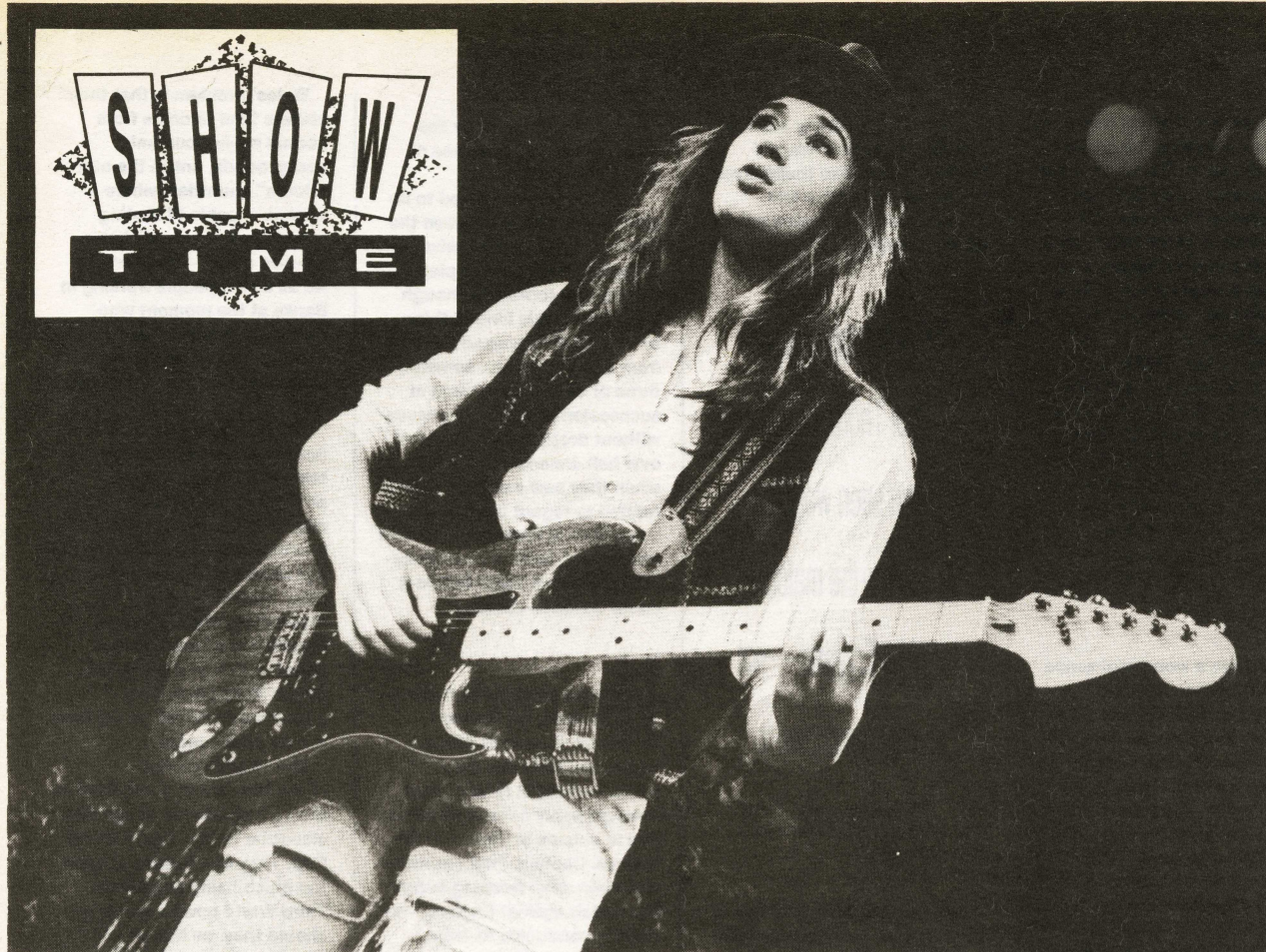


SHOW TIME



Sarah Merrigan: feels at home with her body!

HERE SHE COMES...

SARAH MERRIGAN: (St. Andrew's Lane Theatre Dublin)

BEFORE THIS gig I felt that Sarah Merrigan would be a star — I wasn't sure when, it might take a few years, but she'd get there. I came away convinced that she already *is* one.

It takes some guts to make your real performing debut in an intimate theatre capable of seating three-hundred and fifty bodies, every single individual amongst whom can spot each hesitant furrow of the brow in glorious CLOSE-UP. This is the kind of setting in which mistakes or inadequacies S-C-R-E-A-M at you. But right from the start Sarah Merrigan reached out and grabbed the audience, charming them, winning them over and finally demolishing any hidden pockets of resistance with a magnificently spirited and accomplished performance.

The set was beautifully paced, mixing tender acoustic elements with funky electric stompers. Sarah's own songs are strong and the settings etched by the band, led by guitar virtuosos Gerry O'Beirne and Conor Brady, were often monumental. One shrewd observer suggested a talent that successfully married the strengths of Bonnie Raitt in her blues mould, Sinead O'Connor, Rickie Lee Jones and Kate Bush — which almost captures it except that Sarah's got a dynamic and sex appeal that's entirely her own...

At just eighteen her command of the stage is extraordinary. She plays like this is what she was born to do, fired with the kind of conviction that normally takes years to develop. She is also a wonderful singer, technically proficient and with a rare and beautiful emotional quality. And she dances like a dervish, matching her natural exuberance with the kind of genuine grace that reveals a young woman who's at home with, and uninhibited about, her body.

Any possibility of doubt was finally wiped out by the encores. The first was a new song of Sarah's entitled, I think, "We Are All Stars" which was simply stunning — the kind of showstopper which even Steven Sondheim might be proud to have written, given an added edge by Sarah's unselfconscious vulnerability.

And finally there was "Mystery Train", a slice of primal rock'n'roll which Sarah, Strat slung over her shoulder like a veteran, powered through like there was no turning back! It wouldn't be out of place to suggest that the ghost of Elvis Presley looked on benignly.

She's not a little girl — but Sarah Merrigan understands...

• Niall Stokes

INTO PARADISE: (The New Inn, Dublin)

SUPPOSEDLY THE last night at the New Inn, this one went on and on towards last-bus time but nobody complained especially since Into Paradise confirmed their status as an alarmingly thoroughbred outfit. For if elegance is a word seldom used about rock songwriters' music as distinct from any meticulous image-faking, then Into Paradise seem to have that rare gift.

Certainly they've a stealthy knack with a chorus. Whereas other bands recycle one chorus through a set and excruciatingly belabour you with it as if they've just discovered the wheel, those of Into Paradise emerge gradually and logically from the undergrowth of their guitars and (so far) stop short of pomp and circumstance. Grandeur and serenity are among the most dangerous values to peddle in rock but (so far, again), Into Paradise are generally avoiding the inflation that goes with the trade.

Of course, they're not always serene, Dave Long is too angry for that, a second-row stevedore to Cathal Coughlan's prop. Similarly, some of us are so profane as to wonder about bassist Rachel Tighe's gum-chewing, her only sign of animation. But as a short, sharp set, an interlude while they rehearse the new live show for their soon-come "Churchtown" album, this was an impressive testament to their quality.

• Bill Graham

THE CRANBERRIES: (The Stables, Limerick)

IT'S LIMERICK again. It's Tuesday night and a stableful of college pop kids are wallowing in cranberries. The Cranberries are four-strong, a traditional pop-fit in that classic mould. The Smiths and The Sundays spring to mind, but only for an instant. You see, The Cranberries are *too* young and *too* naive to owe any debts. They just play and write and sing.

Dolores sings. At eighteen, she's gladhappy and writes about boys in the schoolyard and teen angst at the disco. Behind her, Michael strums a huge guitar, picks nimbly and shuffles briskly through the sweetest leaves of easy melody

guitar pop. Pic: Cathal Dawson

"Uncertain" opens. "Sunday" follows, a queazy, easy, teasing swirl of jangle and pluck and then it's *that* gorgeous single — "Nothing Left At All". This is evasive melody and stirring restraint, all gasps and held-back drums. In years, it will be a treasure. Think of "Hand In Glove" or "Lions In My Own Garden (Exit Someone)". *That* good. And then "Put Me Down" finally convinces us that The Cranberries are nothing less than brilliant, building from a whisper and resisting the temptation to scream.

The Cranberries are twenty of your sweetest dreams and an unending walk down Paradise Way. Love them.

• Colm O'Coughlin

THE JOYS/PET LAMB: (The Baggot Inn, Dublin)

DID I really miss a fascinating TV programme on the American Indians to come up here and see a support band called Pet Lamb for God's sake?!!

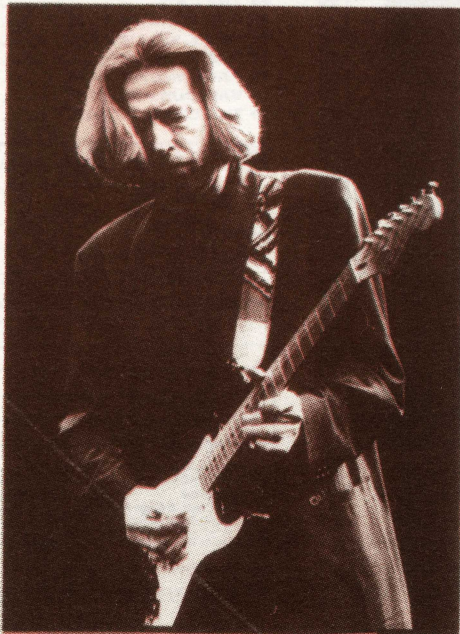
Well, yes, and I'm rather glad I did considering their fine performance. Drawing on spirit from noise popsters over the water (east or west, take your pick), they alternate between veiled sultriness and rollicking razor cuts, and are equal parts tuneless and discordant, tuneful and melodic, with harmonies to match. No messing about, no frills, they just get on with the job and leave us to take them or leave them on their music alone. I'll take some of that

any time.

The Joys get better by the second. It seems like a slow start (about 18 seconds), but then they're up and running. Deirdre got sacked from her job today and it's done her the power of good, her voice has never sounded better. Straight pop for pop's sake and a dance in every number, this band really are rather fine. From "Delicious Things" ("I see the crazy man's on the bus again") through to "Struggle" ("doesn't mean I'm too shit-scared to say bye-bye to you"), it's all sweet when it needs to be and steely-edged when it doesn't.

Finely crafted songs are always a pleasure, and this was a very great pleasure indeed.

• Dan Oggly



Eric Clapton didn't fail to deliver at his recent Point Theatre gigs. Playing to packed houses both nights Clapton delivered some of his greatest moments, including of course "Layla", "Wonderful Tonight" and a particularly rousing "Cocaine". Using a back-to-basics 4-piece (with the inimitable Phil Collins on skins!), Clapton left the crowds screaming for more. Pic: Cathal Dawson

Singles

REVIEWED BY PAUL BYRNE

SINGLE OF THE FORTNIGHT (1)

A TRIBE CALLED QUEST: "Can I Kick It?" (Jive)

I WON'T bore you with the extravagant superlatives here; simply put, this is great. Sample-&-rap merchants par excellence, A Tribe Called Quest take the bassline from "A Walk On The Wild Side", give it a soul beat, throw in some snatches of Ian Dury's "What A Waste" and — fizzbangscratchboomwallop! — make it all sound like they *belong* together. Blissful! This is '90s rock'n'roll, the black man's revenge, the rebirth of rhythm'n'blues.

Can u dig it?

SINGLE OF THE FORTNIGHT (2)

THE HONEY THIEVES: "Secondhand Man" (Solid)

Okay kids, are you listening... This is a Pubic Service Announcement — WITH GUITARS!

With "Secondhand Man" The Honey Thieves deliver every rock'n'roll cliché in the book, and set fire to them. They're not in the game of surprises; they simply play guitars — very fast, and very hard. "Secondhand Man" is like a bulldozer hitting 100mph; there's an assured cockiness here that belies the age of the band (they are young, aren't they?). The single's b-side, "Survival Train", manages to be even more manic and possessed. "Someone stop the train", pleads our dizzy hero, as the guitars swirl relentlessly.

The Honey Thieves — making pubs safe again!



The Honey Thieves: manic

SINGLE OF THE FORTNIGHT (3)

SPACEMEN 3: "Big City" (Fire Records)

I'm allowed to have three Singles Of The Fortnight, aren't I? This is one of those once-in-a-million-years weeks where you have to eliminate contenders rather than search desperately for them.

"Big City" is one of those hypnotic and mesmerising grooves that stays in your head for days. Cruising somewhere betwixt "Heroes" and Giorgio Moroder's "The Chase", with breathy vocals and echoed drums bouncing all over the place, this could go on for hours and you'd never complain. "Let the good times roll", announces head space cadet Sonic Boom, and you'd be a fool to try and stop him.

Whether this means an end to the wonderful Spiritualised, or whether Mr. Boom is merely visiting, it's hard to know. Eitherway, here's hoping they stay together, and on earth, long enough to make another album.

THE SCREECH OWLS: "Desert" (Girl Records)

This very nearly made Single Of The Fortnight (4), but unfortunately there was no money inside the sleeve. Pity. It's a good record!

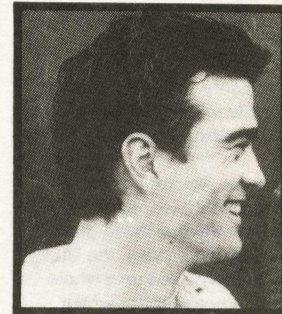
On a half-spoken country-tinged lament, lead singer Debbie Skhow purrs and sneers like a cross between Chrissie Hynde and Laurie Anderson. Despite their local connections The Screech Owls display a refreshing lack of *Irishness* on this record. Now don't get me wrong, I'm as patriotic as

the next man (unless of course, he's a raving Wolfe Tones fan!), but "Desert" sounds like it could be from anywhere.

A band who never lay their hats anywhere too long, this is roots music torn away from the ground. Can u dig it? (I hope that wasn't an attempt at humour —Ed)

THE LA'S: "Feelin'" (Go! Discs)

Of course, any of you out there with even the smallest of brains will already possess this little gem,



A La

having purchased The La's album after hearing their wonderful "There She Goes" single of last year. If you haven't bought the album yet, get ye to a record shop RIGHT NOW (I don't care what time it is!) and rectify your socially embarrassing situation before the neighbours find out.

"Feelin'" is 100% pop bliss. As a rather astute member of the crowd at this month's vital F.A. Cup clash between Fulchester United and Tottenham Hotshots commented, this is "smashing melodic guitar-based pop reminiscent of the early Beatles".

If only all football fans were that articulate.

MADONNA: "Justify My Love" (The Beast Within Mix) (Sire - Import)

What exactly is Madonna trying to say when she reads from The Book Of Revelations over the backbeat of "Justify My Love"? It's certainly not a love song, as she argues herself. And when she says: "I know your tribulations, and your poverty, the slander of those who say they are Jews. They are not. They are a synagogue of Satan", you just know she's looking for trouble. It may be fine for her to use sex to sell her records but anti-Semitism is taking it a bit far, no matter how hip the wrapping. For once in her life Madonna may have picked the wrong people to fuck with. Welcome to The Immaculate Deception.

THE CAROLINE SHOUT: "Into Your Hands" (Danceline Records)

"Into Your Hands" more than lives up to the hype The Caroline Shout have been receiving lately. A confident and stirring offering, it manages to rise above so many of your average Irish pop single releases. And even if at this stage they show more potential than power, they are only just beginning. A very promising start.

THEM: "Baby Please Don't Go" (London)

"From the acclaimed David Lynch film 'Wild At Heart!', shouts the record sleeve, with a little PS; "Also featured on the TV commercial for the Peugeot 205". You've seen the movie, you drove there in your Peugeot 205, now buy the fucking record, for Chrissakes!!!

This is actually one of those essential singles, boasting the seminal "Gloria" on the b-side. Two absolute gems, to be loved, cherished and played very often — why, Van Morrison even manages a Mona Lisa smile on the sleeve. Now *that's* something worth having.