



Julian: Making girls unhappy

CORK ROCK '91: (Sir Henry's, Cork)

HELLO ONCE again and welcome to Cork Rock. This is three nights of truly remarkable Irish pop and, in years to come, we'll be telling our children that we were there. Naturally they won't believe us but, for the record, we've got shuttle-flights full of record company people. We've got BP Fallon. We've got bulging houses filled with flailing popkids. And we've got **The Frank And Walters**.

This band are remarkably-flared power-poppers with more hooks than Herrol Graham. "Davy Chase" and "Fashion Crisis Hits New York" have us stomping and BP Fallon is impressed. A band who'll kick you in the teeth. **The Precious Stones** have lots of denim clothes and some little stadium songs on the back boiler. They're rather clever footballers too and deserve their every luck. **The Subterraneans** are reborn and revamped and are still stunningly brilliant. They open with "Gameshow", they close with "I Fought The Law" and in between they box clever with groovy pop fists. Take them to the haven of your bed. But keep some space too for **The Intoxicating Rhythm Section**, the band who once asked U2 to support them at The Baggot Inn. Sampling James Brown (again) and Kraftwerk did them no harm and this funk-laden groove-riff machine had us open-mouthed upfront. **Bird** follow on, the sound of muso-pop with songs. Rare enough, that. Great voice, bundles of energy and "Sex Control" is amazing.

Night two and we're into overdrive. **The Wishing Stones** surprise with three-way harmonies and chiming guitar-pop. "Shirley" is a corker. And then **The Brilliant Trees** appear and play great songs very greatly indeed. They're rather, well...brilliant, in fact. **The Cranberries** are next and put us all to shame with the most beautiful girl-pop you'll hear all year. "Put Me Down", "Linger" and "Dreams" are the sounds of next year's Chart Show right now and God, how we swoon. **A Touch Of Oliver** bring a touch of the unexpected to their guitar rambles. "Golden Valley Reserve", "Burn" and "Candy Bottle Green" are spiffing, but we need just a tad more bollocks here and we'd be laughing. And then it's **Chelsea Drugstore**, playing well-intentioned generic Deacon Blue that's half-clever and slightly out of focus. The kids upfront are disappointed. Put it down to nerves and expectation. I did.

So then to the last night at the fair. **Lir** continue to divide and conquer. They're doing their own thing and couldn't care less. **Azure Days** follow with lots of moody pop songs with great tunes. Songs like "Anything For You", "Back Down To Justice" and "World Junk" are pristine and liquid. The girls loved them. **Toasted Heretic** are utterly amazing, Julian Gough shining with the huge self-belief of young Morrissey. They take this one by the throat and throttle it halfway to delirium. "Galway And Los Angeles" is the best song we've heard all year. **Therapy** pick it up and chainsaw their way into our bloodstreams. They open with "Punishment Kiss" and head-but their way through some psychotic dog-rock trashcore and it's amazing.

Finally, **The Sultans Of Ping FC**, who have the most incredible underpants in pop. Once in love with football, now in love with sex, this band put the rot back into erotic and kick like hell. Tonight Cork, tomorrow the universe.

Cork Rock, amazingly brilliantly, remarkably beautiful. It could only happen here.

• Colm O'Callaghan



This man is Jesus

THE STUNNING: (Walker's Hotel, Drogheda)

IT'S ONLY a few weeks since myself and about four hundred others failed to gain admittance on The Stunning's first visit to the now-defunct much-loved Boxing Club, so tonight's return trip to Drogheda is definitely an exercise in Keeping The Fans Happy.

Knowing that you are currently one of the biggest-drawing band in Ireland could make you complacent but on the night The Stunning avoid that accusation with conviction, impressively unveiling some fresh material, which is apparently destined for their second album, due towards the end of the summer. Thus "Angel By Her Side" finds Derek Murray switching from lead guitar to organ with aplomb whilst "Supernatural Thing" sounds like a close relation to "Tight Rope Walker".

Boxing seems to be very influential in The Stunning scheme of things. Apart from the "Heads"

video one new songs boasts the line "A fighter's pride is built on fear", while Steve Wall manages to drag religion into it, dedicating "Heads" to our leading local head, St. Oliver Plunkett. Steve is also adept at the time-old tradition of borrowing song titles so that "She's Not There" is about a ghost he knows rather than a Zombie (cryptic, eh?). The build-up is powerful and even though it's their first gig in four weeks, they have no problems winning encores, wheeling on "Hey, Mr. Ginger" and "Turn It On" to reflect a '60's-ish shift in direction.

On tonight's showing they'll have no problems in Ireland for quite a while but internationally The Stunning might just be considered revisionist. The new album could make or break them — and in that context what they need now is a favourable bounce of the ball, an element of luck even...

Wish it to them!

• Gavin Kierans

BJORN AGAIN: (Sandford House, Ranelagh/Leisureland, Galway)

AT FIRST I thought I was dreaming. Nah, this couldn't be happening, I thought, and put the vision down to the side-effects of a particularly virulent bout of food poisoning combined with an unnaturally high intake of mineral water. Why are these people wearing flares, kimonos and thigh-high boots? Why are they speaking in Swedish accents? Why are they playing note-perfect versions of ABBA songs? Why am I dancing?

The answers to these earth-shattering questions were only partly answered on the night, as Björn Again turned a stuffed Sandford House into Pop Paradise for a blissful ninety minutes. Rational thought went the way of the bulk of my food intake for the previous three days as "Waterloo" gave way to the bounteous beat of "Bang A Boomerang" and the eternally effervescent "S.O.S." melded with the jungle jolly-up of "I Am A Tiger".

That ABBA were one of the greatest Pop bands ever to set foot on this undeserving little asteroid of ours is beyond doubt, but to hear those songs pounded out in a sweaty pub with love and laughter almost reduced me to a babbling idiot. The daft intros, super-large telephones for "Ring Ring", wide-brimmed hats for "Money Money Money" and the carefully choreographed routines of Frida Longstokin and Agnetha Falstart made this the Pop Experience Of The Year...so far.

So much so, in fact, that two nights later I found myself in Galway for a repeat dose. Unfortunately, those readers who've followed my adventures in the pages of *Hot Press* will doubtless be aware of The Curse which follows me — albatross-like — around the country, and tonight it was Björn Again's turn to suffer. A mere twenty-seven people crammed into Leisureland for the full-scale Björn Again experience, a *Bryne-fide* disaster in other words. And yet...

Taking our cue from the spirit of The Blitz, we twenty-seven brave souls stormed to the front, placed our coats on the floor and proceeded to dance around them, while Björn Again battled bravely to bring some badly needed glitz'n glamour to this far-flung outpost of Pop. As an event it was tremendous, as the stadium-quality lights framed the quixotic quarter in those perfect poses and we danced...oh, how we danced.

If you've never seen an entire audience mimic the routine for "Ring Ring" in a cavernous ballroom then you haven't lived. Like Christmas except earlier, like snow except whiter, like money except cheaper...this was art and orgasm fused in one fantastic lollipop.

The sparklers we held during "Fernando" may now only be so much copper-wire and burnt-out carbon...but The Flame of Björn Again will burn forever. And I think I can safely speak for the other twenty-six Pop patriots in Galway when I say: "Björn Again...Thank Your For The Music."

• George Byrne

INSPIRAL CARPETS: (National Stadium, Dublin)

WE MAY be small in number but we have impeccable taste. Tonight's turnout is pathetic, my countrymen and women it appears, more interested in ted in examinations and nights by the fire than an evening of undiluted pop thrills. Is Maths Paper One more important than an opportunity to jump up and down and bellow like cows at a bunch of guys bearing musical instruments? I think not.



Call him Paul

PAUL SIMON: (RDS, Dublin)

THE MAN beside me is a leading light in the Ballincollig Jazz Society. He's here because he's a big fan of "Brazilian free-form percussion".

The group in front of me consists of an elderly couple and their three pre-teen grandchildren. To my right, there are two young men wearing tasteful RDS headbands and cut-off T-shirts, their every gesture unleashing great tidal waves of cider-aroma. This particular duo's speciality is the dance that Chevy Chase did in the "You Can Call Me Al" video, a routine which they perform with ever-increasing clumsiness as the night progresses.

A Paul Simon audience is a broad church. With a career spanning four decades, this is hardly surprising. But what is surprising is the all-pervasive 'family-outing' feel of this crowd in the RDS. Especially, when you consider that, of late, Simon has become more musical ethnographer than entertainer. Remember his "Graceland" show when, with only a couple of concessions, he refused to play any of his old stuff and concentrated instead on using his set as a giant South African music showcase.

You disappoint me.

Anyway the carpet band with two marvellous LPs and a reputation for lights like you've never seen 'em before live excellence deserve more than this. But they still come on and play like Mattheus, bless their little hearts. "She Comes In The Fall" is first and crap. "Grip" is second and finer than the weather we're currently enjoying. From there on in it's across the board fire and

That performance did feature some priceless moments - but it also bored the arse off a lot of people...

Tonight was different. This was a full scale Paul Simon concert with a heavy helping of the hits that brought these toddlers and grannies together in the first place. To raucous screams of approval, he and the band delivered vigorously re-upholstered versions of "Bridge Over Troubled Water", "Cecilia", "Totem Pole", "Homeward Bound", "Still Crazy After All These Years", "Me And Julio", Late In The Evening" and an encore of "Sound Of Silence" and "The Boxer" that was as light and cosy as a duvet.

The spine of the concert, however, was made up of material from "Graceland" and "The Rhythm Of The Saints". Here, the band which included a half-dozen Brazilian percussionists really cut loose, re-inventing many of the songs and playing with a sure-handed restraint that belied their ferocity. The percussionists were a sideshow in themselves, flailing about the place and walloping on a whole orchestra of found objects from gourds to sheets of metal to instruments which closely resembled bright-green onion sacks. All of this provided a cinematic

rhythmic backdrop against which Simon with the assistance of the other players splashed his characteristic day-glo melodies and crazy-paving lyrics.

Some of the more muted songs from "The Rhythm Of The Saints" (particularly "Born At The Right Time" and "She Moved On") were given a more flashy, loose-limbed treatment which probably made them more accessible for the uninitiated. There were also great versions of "The Boy In The Bubble", "Diamonds On The Soles Of Their Shoes" and, for some reason, two versions of "You Can Call Me Al".

It wasn't a complete triumph, however. The RDS acoustics as usual did their best to foul up proceedings, and succeeded on a number of occasions. There was also an ill-considered fifteen minute barrage of instrumental improvisation half-way through the show which allowed Simon to go backstage to change his toupee or whatever. The man from Ballincollig might have enjoyed it but I certainly didn't.

Ultimately though, this was a show for all the family that delivered exactly what it promised. The fact that about fifty people were still singing "The Boxer" outside Paddy Cullen's at 1am attests to that.

• Liam Fay

brimstone and treacle, great songs played perfectly and sung by probably the finest singer since me before my voice broke. That said, although tonight is flawless and genuinely exciting the overall mood is one of muted disappointment, one which I share.

This is because we all expected a repeat of last April's McGonagles happening, a show where I danced so vigorously that my head and shoulders ached for a full week

afterwards. We expected half the weight of our bodies to disappear in clouds of steam, we expected apparitions and miracles and sore throats in the morning, we expected next week's Lotto numbers carved in tablets of stone.

But what the heck, they gave us five and I'm happy, so you still should've been there. I hope you fail!

• Michael O'Hara