

HELLFIRE SERMONS

THE MONARCH, LONDON

THERE'S a revolution going on, people, and I'm at the heart of it! Here, in this raging inferno of adolescent frustrations and barely frothing beer known as The Monarch, the kids are revolting. Truly revolting. Huggy Bear are here, angry fanzine-wielding Riot Grrrls are here. Yes, the Grrrl generation are out in force. There must be at least 35 of them. And these kids are rejecting the trappings of capitalist society, casting aside materialism and leaving their expensive mountain bikes chained up outside the door. Not only that, but they are refusing to pander to the oppressive doctrines of the national music papers that are scattered suspiciously about the tables by *refusing to read them!* For two or three minutes at least!

Into this abyss come Hellfire Sermons, possibly the only people in here not modelling Talulah Gosh, Heavenly Records or similar tee-shirts and the only boys apart from me to look like Real Men, not particularly pony girlies. Hellfire Sermons are addressing Serious Issues, like the relevance of spectacles in rock, and whether or not a band can use an old Fall B-side as a basis for a career.

Actually, this lot can, because, despite my considerable cynicism, Hellfire Sermons are pretty rockin' good. In places, anyhow. Like when the guitars stop fanning around and their awkward yet plangent melodies manage to invoke the ghosts of Blue Orchids, Buzzcocks and Mark E. Smith's "No Xmas For John Quays". And all at once!

Mostly, I like the Sermons' lyrical equation that goes "I am a singer/ And I am a sinner." I'm also prone to agreeing with it, but things like technique don't matter anymore cos this is Garageland and Hellfire Sermons are a garage band.

Although, tonight, it's my bullshit detector rather than my aural faculties that came close to overload.

DAVE SIMPSON



Pic: Steve Gullikx

WAKE UP! WAKE UP!

THERAPY?

CAMDEN PALACE, LONDON

WAKE up . . .

Camden Palace is swelled to capacity, piled up with kids lured on the promise of "Very Special Guests", queuing up at the bar with their parents' gold Amex (necessary for the purchase of half-a-lager), or moshing around the dance-floor to Metallica and Rage Against The Machine. Some of them think they're here to see Suede. Others mistakenly believe Rollins will be treading the boards in a similarly dainty fashion. These notions are blown to smithereens when the brazenly bared torso of Mickey McKeegan appears stage left and Therapy? detonate into "Potato Junkie".

The effect is gratifying. The Suede posse stream back downstairs with amazing speed, while the rest of the sizeable drunken contingent begin moshing with heady abandon. Continuing with the delights, the lads toss out "Meat Abstract" and a version of "Teethgrinder" with the lyrics thoughtfully changed into "Sheepshagger". So far, so good. And then . . .

They start playing stuff off "Nurse". I don't know where I differed from the bunch of critics who held their A&M debut up as a masterpiece, but "Nurse" wasn't the futuristic speedball masterpiece I expected. It was experimental - fine, but their Techno, sample-happy, big ballad rummaging has robbed them of their incisive power.

Something has happened in the transition between Wiiiija and the Big Boys.

Therapy? stopped delighting in their obsession with the bizarre, acting out the roles of Messrs Kemper and Gein with convincing, voyeuristic excitement and wicked humour, and started analyse themselves instead. Bad move. "Nurse" was disappointed when it should have been dismembered. And, worse still, their new single sounds like The Dickies.

Maybe it's not just me. Therapy? gigs used to be a carnival of shared S&M delights - remember SMJ fleeing from the balcony-diving beserkers at their Mean Fiddler show last year? Now, as Therapy? zoom through "Accelerator", "Nausea" and the rest, the bods in the pit become more and more subdued.

I hope this is a glitch. I really want it to be. Of course, nothing can replace the heady euphoria of starting out, but those days are gone. Therapy? have had a lot of pressure applied to them, really quickly, and the expectations on them are frighteningly high.

I hope they get some time to themselves. And then I hope they get back their delight at how far they can take things, and start thrilling again. More than anything, I hope they never do end up living their worst nightmare - being the U2 it's okay to like. Tonight they came horribly close.

CATHI UNSWORTH

exercise in understated melancholy, and the battered, fragile optimism of "Work It Out Somehow" is genuinely uplifting.

You really ought to watch these quiet types.

DAVE JENNINGS

LUSCIOUS JACKSON

THE GRAND, NEW YORK

Debut

ONE day soon I'll find a boy band with cool to kill for. But until then, try these . . .

Imagine five girls who are like a cross between Massive Attack, the savvy of Lunachicks and a debutante's party on the Lower East Side. Now go away and find a cold compress and lie down and melt for 15 hours. I'm not lying. I'd die to find myself in such icy-cool company again.

Frequently, NYC's catty Luscious Jackson remind me of Thomas O'Malley, that scurrilous ne'er-do-well from "Lady And The Tramp", and his swinging truant band of funky jazzateers. But that cat's a tom, and Luscious are bitches, so there goes the first spurious comparison straight out the window.

Let's add a couple to join it: Madonna circa "Justify My Love", without the good-time sleaze; "Sassy" magazine aimed at teenage boys just reaching puberty; The Waitresses (if only cos every band from New York with the smallest amount of sass should be compared to 'em) flirting with big-time success; Soul Family Sensation, only mellow, funkier . . . and someone much more raw and basic, into ideas, not guitars - Blood Sausage, maybe! And let's not forget the gorgeous/gorged raps which first spent everyone in the art department spiralling round with such delicious abandon all those weeks ago.

The DJ tonight is Mike D from the Beasties, spinning an eclectic mix of girlcentric punk, eager early Seventies funk and kickin' rap. This has relevance.

One: Luscious Jackson have just signed to his new label. Two: Kate, their drummer, was the original fourth Beastie Boy. Three: we all know Kim Gordon. Four: it shows what a hip, happening crowd I hang with, freed of the deadbeats back home. (Just kidding!)

Relevant words for Ms Jackson: purring, scratching, tiger-r-r-ish, sensual, ultra cool, luscious. They would certainly never scrawl their names in haemophilic crimson across the city sewers, dead of night. Much. The boys will pout, the girls will out.

Forty-five minutes of feline nirvana, and only 300 broken hearts.

Claws out, girls! Miaow!
EVERETT TRUE



Pic: Phil Nicholls

SHIVERY! DELICIOUS! ASPHYXIATING!

STEREOLAB

BASS CLEF, LONDON

I'D have to call it grace under pressure, this swirlsome evening in the venue from hell.

Theirs: Stereolab turn out an icy-smooth, if brief, set using, by the sounds of it, a laughably inadequate PA. Things keep starting and stopping, and there are the tell-tale clomping noises of people trying to sort it out.

Mine: gradual asphyxiation by our readers, which you might consider rough justice of some kind. I'm 12 people back from the stage, unable to see the band at all, squeezed on all sides by determined Japanese tourist girls and bowl-headed indie boys describing clockwise and counterclockwise head circles as they dance. Generally, this makes me think about stabbings.

But wait! Put that knife away! Having previously relegated Stereolab to a slot marked "shoegazing also-rans", I've had to smartly revamp my calcified opinions after one less-than-ideal gig. Shivery! Delicious! Go see them! Not at this venue!

They're dreamy music lovers, deceptively low-key, but building up one hell of a head of steam as

the set progresses. In contrast to the unapologetic spaciousness of the records, live, they're bouncy as a rubber ball. The compact, swirling toy town Farfisa sounds with which Tim Gane douses the band's slight, pretty pop conceits creates a multicoloured environment that demands bouncing faces. It's certainly got me re-evaluating the instrument in question, what with memories of Inspirational Carpets and all.

Vocally, and as "Doubt" (smashed off with star-time aplomb) shows, the Stereolab girls seldom bother with words, but manage to make "la-la-la-la" sound thoroughly eloquent. They're lazy, loose-necked, sugar-and-ice cubes, careful and careless at the same time, like some hipster-dream amalgam of Lush and Nico and Claudine Longet and Astrid Gilberto.

Improbably, a space clears just enough to glimpse Letitia, her suave composure strictly Emma Peel territory. She's rippling through the Velvet-y "Au Grand Jour" and smiling, vaguely majestically, at the rows of sausage-fans before her. I would too, if I were her.

JENNIFER NINE

THE CRANBERRIES

THE IRISH CENTRE, LEEDS

THE diminutive, black-haired girl in front of me is having trouble getting in. "But I've only just come out!" she protests. It's Dolores, singer with The Cranberries.

The frail songstress' unfortunate predicament tonight serves as a timely metaphor for The Cranberries' experience. When they were "discovered", two years ago, they had the world and the critics at their feet. They're already better than Curve and The Sundays, gushed one review, and Island signed them. But fateful forces beyond the band's control were to conspire against them, and The Cranberries spent most of '92 biting their nails while the world passed them by.

Ironically, it's The Cranberries' very absence last year which could prove to be their salvation. In '92 they would almost certainly have been trampled in the crush to worship at the altar of noise. Now their harmonies emerge like a breath of fresh air. This year, The Cranberries have suddenly found new context. A shame, then, that this hasn't bred new confidence.

To say that the slightly fey guitarists lack presence is to state that you can't photograph a ghost. Dolores is a spectre of her former self: ashen, painfully thin, shorn of her locks and bleached out by the lights. But this is no freak show, and as the music takes hold, we forget the band's countenance and surrender to their dreams. Like "Linger", the sound of unrequited love shattering in the darkness, or "Waltzing Back", a chilly lament for former Smiths fans.

Of course, at times listening to The Cranberries is like dating a dream girl only to discover she's brought her brother along. Sometimes, the band fail to frame such a startling voice as Dolores' in the setting it deserves. The root note bass-playing shows little imagination, and the drummer ought to realise that fills add to the thrills. But mostly they gel just fine. Sadness rarely sounded so seductive.

This could be their year. Treat them with kid gloves, and let them smother you in bluest velvet.

DAVE SIMPSON

REVOLUTION 9

THE FALCON, LONDON

"OBSERVING each **Debut**

detail so precious and perfect/Slowly seduced by the shadows and silence . . .

Revolution 9's own words, from the dark and delicious "The Watcher", neatly describe the way I feel listening to them. Their music is detailed, shadowy and seductive; and even if they are named after The Beatles' most extravagant acidic weird-out, the north London trio are hypnotic, not psychedelic. Often they recall the subdued Velvet Underground of, say, "Pale Blue Eyes" - all the more so when David Barbanel switches from murmuring bass to elegant cello. These people know that quietly intense music can

sometimes leave marks on your psyche which last longer than the thrills and bruises you get from moshpit frenzy.

Singer-guitarist John Moore infuses his tales of romantic magic and loss with a sleepy sensuality that may well soon make him a popular object of nocturnal longing. This is, after all, ideal small-hours music. Katie Hecker's languid percussion adds to the bohemian, faintly decadent ambience. You half expect to see joss-sticks smouldering at the back of the stage, or maybe a concession stall outside selling berets and cappuccino.

Revolution 9 would probably be that bit too fashion-plate cool, if the songs didn't carry such resonance; but "Wintersong" is a gorgeous