

sounding, though – with a healthy percentage of the crowd garbed in Things merchandise, there's no need for such apologetic tactics. Despite a God-given grasp of teensnot politics and an unswerving commitment to live work, they still aren't pushing for contention in the pop promotion race.

long wallow in a bath of mediocrity. I enter Barrowland with a mind so open my brain has to be held in with a seatbelt. By the time I leave, I'm convinced Carter aren't worth the effort of switching off the alarm clock, never mind getting out of bed for. (Fiona Shepherd)

▼ LIVE



TOP

The Venue, Edinburgh, 3 Nov. It's one of those 'quiet nights' at The Venue. Forty people, maybe, on a freezing Sunday evening. Perhaps this was predictable; neither band are well-established. Top's pulling power comes mainly from radio play of their singles, and enthusiastic friends in the press. They're getting the hype and the chances, but they still have to sway those who are just curious.

A wisp of smoke heralds the arrival of Ireland's The Cranberries. They're unpretentious, playing their simple set with feeling. Delores O'Reardon's voice is a moody siren's wail, filling

the hall, soaring over rippling guitars. Despite some ragged endings and the odd unremarkable song, they build warmth, passing some honestly touching moments. When they leave the stage, it feels inevitable that they'll return as headliners. Hopefully soon.

The stage undergoes some transformation to prepare for Top. All of a sudden, there seems to be a lot of hardware about: multiple mixing desks, whirly lights, non-whirly lights, strange boxes with suspicious functions. For a few bizarre seconds, there appear to be more people in the road crew than the audience. Then the band amble in, three loose-jointed Liverpool guys. A hammering drum kicks them into the first song, 'Bad Luck', and the stage explodes with whirly lights and smoke. Top play pop, pure and simple, but it loses something in the live translation. Paul Cavanagh's vocals are unenthusiastic, and Joe Fearon's backing voice stays hidden in the mix throughout.

People's initial reaction, dancing, quickly becomes artificial, until they're doing it just to get their money's worth. Top's delivery becomes gradually more uninspired: they throw away their two best weapons, 'No. 1 Dominator' and 'Buzzin'' without much interest. Their last one, 'She's Got The World', goes unannounced and Top vanish offstage, painfully aware of the lack of demand for an encore. Their set was forty minutes long, ten minutes less than their support.

It's obvious who was on top here, and it wasn't the headliners. (Gavin Inglis)

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