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THE SENSELESS THINGS HAMMER IT OUT

READING 91

FOUR PAGE SPECIAL



EMF ★ DINOSAUR JR ★ YOUNG DISCIPLES ★ THE CRANBERRIES ★ SPIRITUALIZED

LIVE!

SENSELESS THINGS/ MILK POWERHAUS, LONDON

IT seems a peculiar notion billing the philosophical emotions of Milk's guitar ridden rock alongside the dynamism of Senseless Things' guitar pop. It's cool if you can switch moods during the interval and proves worth it, because both these bands are the cream of their crop.

Tonight Milk are ready with a whole batch of new songs and full of a "wham, bam, how's that?" attitude. Seething. Which is just fine. Their funeral march tempos shudder like monster blubber. Their rhythmic clusters are a savage surge of pain. Anyone who can't stomach it is a fool, I say. If anything, Milk are hinting at becoming a British Thin White Rope. And if life were a series of movies, this is one you'd be a damn fool not to get into.

The Senseless fans have no energy left, having queued this long summer evening to get in, and rock woefully to Milk. But the Things have enough to spare for everybody. They storm through their rich repertoire like boys on bicycles saying, "look, no hands". In this size venue the sound is hard and vital, the power it allows irresistible, so they go on, and on. And on.

Suddenly bass player Morgan is itchy. Guitarist Ben seems smiley and thoughtful. Vocalist Mark, is of course, his usual pretty self. His smile is genuine and his eye lids are half shut. But the eyes still sparkle, hinting at the forthcoming wonder that is "Hanging Out With My Ex", an uncharacteristically long song with a jazzy dribble, and a hip beat. A classic with youth on its side, no less. The kind of nostalgia that's right.

NGAIRE



RODDY FRAME & EDWYN COLLINS MARCO'S LEISURE CENTRE, EDINBURGH

THERE must be a gag somewhere about how fitting it was for Frame and Collins to play The Fringe but I'm too busy coming down (hey!) from this great night to hunt for it. Perhaps irony is more in order. Long gone are the days when Roddy and Edwyn wore their chin-skirting follicular appendages like Roger McGuinn's. *Tempus fugit*, and all that but there hovered the horrifying possibility that tonight's all-acoustic center through two equally formidable back catalogues might be the final, dodderingly driven nail in the coffin of Postcard's memory, the *Sound Of Prematurely Greying Scotland* chorusing on "Those Were The Days" and hitting the road in time to get the kids to bed. Turn on, tune in, go to the office late on Monday.

Not a bit of it. Frame and Collins have irony coming out of their ears, and while such a qualification might not always guarantee gripping entertainment, it sure keeps ball-in-the-bag nostalgia at bay. Tonight was an exorcism and celebration of past glories on a par with The Velvet Underground in Paris last year, a wide-eyed wander through the leafy willows of yesteryear and a thumbail sketch of things to come. Things like a new Frame composition, "Spanish Horses", a melodic tumbrel of Catalan motifs and spiralling harmonies that preserves in aspic the cool romantic

aspirations of Postcard at its finest. Frame described it as "a cross between avant-garde and, uh, art. . .", which is fair enough, despite the line about "running a red light through Gaudi's soft confusion".

Really it was fabulous. I wish you'd been there. You probably were actually. Oxygen was at a premium in this low-ceilinged prefab common-room as the pair took a song each in turn, swapped some dodgy Vic Reeves repertoire, hammed it up rotten during the guitar solos (a practise, incidentally, now as cliched as the Quo-wank it parodies) and generally gave the impression this was something they might do more often.

The hits kept coming - "Oblivious", "Consolation Prize", a "Down The Dip" that paid tribute to Dylan with its twisted scansion and segue into "It's Alright Ma", "Birth Of The True" and "Simply Thrilled Honey" with ex-Joseph K man Malcolm Ross adding squalls of feedback to one of Collins' feyest, limpest anthems to androgyny-as-a-way-of-getting-girls. As Edwyn might have said, it was rockin' good news. Really, life wouldn't be worth living if this was a once in a lifetime event.

ALLAN BROWN

LIR SIR HENRY'S, CORK

DUBLIN is this year's European cultural capital. Beckett and Yeats are very sweet buzzwords again and there are floating art pieces on the river Liffey. But in the pop-clubs and smelly halls we're celebrating some very dubious cultures indeed. There are hippy chicks squatted on the pedestrian streets beading and plaiting hair at a price. There are lots of young art-kids struggling with goatee beards and hippies with long hair and smocks are dancing barefoot in the parks. And that's where Lir come in.

Lir are five young men who sound like It Bites and Marillion and Camel and Led Zeppelin. They're heavily fancied and have had lots of record company pigs to their table. There are lots of American A&R accents at their shows and some of the band look like very young and confused Grateful Dead people. Lir can sardine most of Dublin's pop-pits at the drop of a hat, but we've always had to make our excuses and leave. Tonight we're vindicated.

Lir are away from home and out of sorts. Alright, so they sweat and they're tight and they probably believe in what they do. Fine. They're competent and confident, but they have nothing like a song. Same old story, really.

"Three Legged Girl" is "Purple Haze", all dressed-up but going nowhere in particular, a bit like Norhrips various bites at an Irish rock-trad-folk-prog thing somewhere in the dark Seventies. Sometimes we even think that Lir must be jamming, their songs go bump and stop and start again and have different tunes and devious middle-bits and bits that just seem to be there because they sounded alright at the time. The guitarist is stunningly good, though, and he wears a nice half-beard, but his funky and grooved-up and hard-ass stings are lost to enormous melodic voids. And while "Halcyon Days" is their best song by country miles, "Advice To The College Girl" and "Memorial" are just there to take up time and space and energy, like Yes playing Spinal Tap's "Stonehenge". Basically, Lir just never happen.

As we leave, there are two drinks on the street flailing fists and wailing broken bottles, both of them cut to the bone, bleeding horribly. Lir's love, peace and harmony is, I'm sure, all very nice, very nice. But not until the next world.

COLM O'CALLAGHAN



FRUIT OF THE GLOOM

THE CRANBERRIES THE UNDERWORLD, LONDON

YOU haven't heard of The Cranberries? Welcome back from Mars. Question: how do you get if you whack a smallish non-blonde Irish girl with a voice on soaring terms with Liz Cocteau, Harriet Sunday and Bjork Sugarcube in front of three Kevin Shields impersonators? Answer: every press officer, journalist and A&R person in the kingdom and a whole heap of unruly expectations. You can count the regular Joe Josephine Public punters in here on the index finger of one hand. For the moment, The Cranberries are very big news in a very small world.

It's a world full of people with power, though, like it or not. So tonight counts. But, as I say, you're not here, we are, so it probably wouldn't go amiss to explain that The Cranberries are four young things from the west coast of Ireland whose demo tape and summer dates with Moose aroused the sort of interest not enjoyed by a new British group since Curve, Lush or The Sundays. It might also be worth stressing for those of you who didn't get that cassette or see those early gigs that The Cranberries have already been compared to the bedsit stuff by the Cocteau, and that singer Dolores O'Riordan looks set to be the latest heartthrob of every gangling teen neurotic from Rugby to Reading.

Most importantly, it perhaps wouldn't be unwise to inform you that, if tonight's performance is any measure, we really have gone too far too soon this time. In their defence, The Cranberries are victims of such awful technical problems that the sound bears scant relation to the recorded variety. Consequently, the band give up trying to

reproduce the pretty delicacy of "Linger" and "Dreams" in favour of an all-out bludgeoning multi-guitar attack that is more Stooges than Slowdive. In addition, this being the first public appearance of The Cranberries since their major label signing, they look, in the words of one member of the audience, "More terrified than any band I've ever seen."

But, in the interests of truth and public service (just think how much money you've wasted because hacks never miss an opportunity to exaggerate, or even alter, the facts), what has been trumpeted as the latest and greatest meeting of celestial female vocals and exquisite male noise is, in reality, Sinead-sings-Joy Division/New Order, Everything But The Girl with feedback, Talulah Gosh on the verge of a nervous breakdown. From first song, "The Same Old Story", to the final one, "Dreams", the crowd play a game of spot-the-reference Chinese Whispers that starts at Siouxsie, includes Patti Smith (!) and Throwing Muses, and ends at All About Eve.

It's a mess, basically. We are, at various points, talking folk-rock or goth-grunge when, to be honest, The Cranberries should be aiming for the purity and originality that is within their grasp. "Put Me Down" is as lovely as the Cocteau's "Pandora", and for once Dolores' voice is given room to roam. And "Pathetic Sense" hints at a winning ability to contrive simply thrilling guitar pop (very Go-Go's, weirdly enough). But that's it. For the rest we're ransacking the *Thesaurus* for new ways to say "Disappointed".

PAUL LESTER

THE SCREECH OWLS MEAN FIDDLER ACUSTIC ROOM, LONDON

FOR tonight's performance, mama Owl Debbie Skhow has chosen a straw stetson and a white jacket with extinct amphibians stencilled upon it. Americans, hah! She'd stand out a mile were it not for the type of person who never grew out of rummaging in mummy's dressing-up box; grown women in tutus and saris with blue suede desert boots. Erk. Something to do with the support band apparently. We just don't know how to carry off that kind of flamboyance in Blighty, do we? And first we have to sit through a home-grown chanteuse who reminds us just how drab singer-songwriters can be.

Then Debbie and her chosen Owls of the day - a Japanese accordionist, a woman with a big guitar and a willowy trumpeter - take the stage and show how to do it, how to go beyond your diaries and your adolescent twinges, get deeper and reach further.

Apparently, a few years living in London has turned Ms Skhow into a kind of poet in exile, and a forlorn one, at that. The songs keep returning to desert imagery, barren love-lives and the loneliness instinct. "Pray for love! I may as well pray for water in the desert", the three women sing in wavering harmony on "There Are Those" while the trumpet sounds simultaneously warm and lost. It's a shivery song, dying to be recorded. On "Desert" itself she doesn't sing so much as narrate: "My father lived in a desert of his own making". The words "Patti" and "Smith" spring to mind, a lazy comparison perhaps but they share that mix of poetry and sharp Televisiony guitars. When she's not speaking, Debbie sings in a plangent voice and scrubs awkwardly at a Rickenbacker she tells us she's always wanted to play. She's cheerful and humorous on stage but quickly slips into the dark, godforsaken region of her songs.

There's always room for music this thoughtful and evocative but it's an endangered species. The Screech Owls were quietly thrilling for half an hour and then vanished. Debbie Skhow is without a record contract. **JIM ARUNDEL**

THE BRIDEWELLS TRADES CLUB, LEEDS

IF a week in politics is a long time, a year in pop is an eternity. This time last summer The Bridewell Taxis were fighting it out with Paris Angels and Northside as the band most likely to. They were being hounded by a pack of major labels and they boasted a following to rival that of many League football clubs. Something, somewhere, went badly wrong (starting, it seems, with Mick Roberts' horrific injury in a pub brawl) and the Cabs are now without a deal, without a trombonist and, it seems, without a semblance of their former audience.

All is not lost, though. A clutch of new songs has got the majors sniffing around again and the changes being rung are multiple. Out, along with the much-maligned horn, is the "Taxis" part of their former name, and in comes Carl, a second keyboard player of no small talent and quite possibly their salvation.

It's like starting over, and tonight's set of mostly new material signifies a considerable shift away from the breezy pop of their early singles and towards a melodic space rock. "Moving Fast" is awash with complex synchro tinklings, while "Small White Box" is a minor-chord gem and possibly the most sublime song about drug rehabilitation ever written.

If there is a future for this band it rests on one song. "Smile I Still Care" is simply magnificent. Building slowly out of Carl's house piano, it bursts into a chorus of such plangent simplicity it could almost be The Beach Boys up there. It's the best thing they've ever done. Hopefully, it's not too late. **DAVE SIMPSON**

BASTI CAMDEN PALACE, LONDON

A YOGA inner health guide uses the word "Basti" as a reference for a hygienic form of colonic irrigation. The exercise involves squatting over the bath, sucking water up the anus, sloshing it around using your inner sphincter muscles, and then expelling it at great force. I fear that Basti are probably fully aware of this, their music being a whirlpool of punk, metal, House and hip hop. Which, all twisted together, gushes an unforgiving, pounding rock, or with funk-foolery.

The two drummers keep up a sturdy, immaculate momentum. Drummer Dave, on stand-up duty, seems to be the only one enjoying himself. The rest of the band seem committed to banging on hell's door. Dave, meantime, pogos as he beats the cymbals, and the tourists renew their frontline positions for Basti's Brecker Brothers disco cover, "East River", and the innovative, danceable chant that is "Reachout". Frontman Paul stands on stage in the manner of a cornered man, restricted by an awkwardness worn bravely. Snappy tempos make a good match for his and saxophonist Karen's in-your-face vocals. Her sax playing is far from the usual sleazy variety, more like a fog-horn

or, at best, an entire horn section. Standing with her feet together, she is a tiny, shiny person, all taut muscles and determined expressions. The sight of her amongst these clean-cut young men going noisily about their business, an assortment of long shorts flapping around six variations of wrinkly knees, is an off-the-wall and endearing spectacle. But it's not the future of rock 'n' roll. Yet. Is this fate's witchery or their own? Hell, that's anybody's guess. **NGAIRE**

THE RAILWAY CHILDREN / THAT PETROL EMOTION / THE POPGUNS / SPITFIRE HEINEKEN BIG TOP, STAMMER PARK, BRIGHTON

BRIGHTON, summertime. Sea breezes, sunshine in the park, the smell of new-mown dogshit. . . and Spitfire! (short for Jefferson Spitfire, don't you know). Yeah! Rock 'n' roll! Cruisin' blues at 30,000 feet! And after 40 minutes, we haven't shifted an inch from that altitude. Steaming grooves, correct use of guitar, but where are the songs? "On old Doors records," mutters my cynical

WESTING HILL CARNIVAL NOTTING LONDON

HOW ya feelin'? In the carnival? Dunno. It always takes some time to sort your head out in a place that's so buzzing with things it goes critical at points. The sun's roasting, the sound systems are cranked to the max, food is on the grill, the houses are stunning, the police are in body armour, the amount of people is growing and helium balloons are floating just above our heads in silvery fishes and bees and rabbits and Bart Simpson's head shapes. It all kinda throws you, like big overloads and all that. Sounds and sights and smells and colours and moods and feelings. Tons of them, all swirling and intermingling. So just move where it feels best.

The stage under the Westway is covered with canvas pyramids. APATHETIC MC is on the mike in a green romper suit without bunny ears. He's getting well cheesed off as his DJ keeps selecting the wrong tunes. Mr DJ is also in charge of the dub machine, the one that makes all sorts of weird noises like electronic "di-di-di-di" and "whoooooeee" dropping bomb sounds. Unfortunately, it's turned up so loud that when he triggers it first, the apocalypse arrives in everyone's ears. Two ruff voice Roggas then take over for a bit of fast chat across speedy digital rhythms. Yeah, movement and a smart time for FUNDAMENTAL to come on.

The MC introduces them saying their aim is to unite Asian, Afro-Caribbean and White. The man at the front giving the Black Power salute is wearing a "Black Revolutionary Run Tings" tee-shirt and full Palestinian headscarf so that only his eyes show. Minister Farrakhan shouts sampled fire and the rest of them arrive. Weird looking bunch, all

wearing long cassock things, like Middle Eastern Priests. One is in striking white with a serious turban and the other two are in black with big trainers on. Farrakhan stops and big sampled drum loops whipcrack out fast hip-hop style. One of the priests in black does fast ragga chat, looking mad as the words spit, as the other cuts in pure noise from the decks. Swirling, wailing, eerie Eastern and Asian moods drift in and out of the picture from inside the sampler. It's charged, man. Pure insistent weird shit. No doubts.

Down towards Ladbroke Grove and past the Lord Gally Hi-Power sound pumping out the hardcore ragga and it's the Children's Procession. Full of freaky sights. Like lots of giant feathery storks with babies in their beaks. And big wrapped lollipop with rabbits inside. And little kids in golden stents. All sorts of people walk past, bump into you, say "sorry", push past, make way. All sorts of clothes and hair and shoes, all different faces and colours and voices.

The Kiss FM stage is cool. Lots of grass and people lying in the sun. PM DAWN arrive and, yeah, they're cool too. Especially those dancers. Moving on again, past a priest with a Clint Boon haircut and down McGregor Road toward the Shock Sound System, it's hardcore dance vibes now sponsored by Sol. There's not as many House sounds as last year, it's mainly Reggae and Ragga that run things this year. Maybe one year on and some people see House as not real enough, not roots enough, who knows. Of course there's always Zouk or Latin or Soul or Funk or Soca or Calypso or African or Soukous or Hip-Hop to choose from. There's also big wobbly trucks packed with a full steel band giving slowly around.

Ringing on towards eight o'clock and the official stop time and it's still all happening in the orange glow of the setting sun. I'm sitting on a wall watching it all go by. It's been a good one. The police well behaved, the crowd sound, no worries. A few words from earlier come back to me: "When Pavarotti was in the park, you could see 'till after dark. That's my last remark". Notting Hill, 26 years old. See you next year. **IAN McGREGOR**

companion. The singer has the thing with the voice pretty much sorted, but needs to work on the thing with the hips. I suspect Applied Hutchenne Theorem: formula boogie + trainee lovegod = all the sex, drugs and money you can eat. However, INXS have a song. Write some, lads.

Whipping up a storm in a teacup, The Pogguns are no longer the '90b weeklings of indie-jangle. Alas, their sinewy sound can't save a set of mild variations on a theme, broken up only by a backbeat and bassline so "Fool's Gold" that at first I assume it's a pissstake. Kitted out in net curtains and a Rickenbacker, Wendy is the only focus, and she's not enough. "Here's a new one," she announces. Could've fooled me. The songs are fine as far as they go; never further than the end of the street for the paper and some baccy. Doesn't every town have a band like this?

If Steve Mack, That Petrol Emotion's madcap marionette singer, ever finds himself short of cash, he should try flogging surplus charisma to the uninspired frontmen of lesser bands. TPE live are velocity, space and motion. And fun. Drums smack you about the ears, guitars flutter and grind. They blast through all their greatest flops. Melody! Colour! Action! Shyus! "Hey Venus" is too sexy for its shirt; "Sensitize" is so sexy it hurts. I'm still disentangling hooks from my frontal lobes. It's like being force-fed graffiti with an electric spoon. No "Big Decision", no problem. Superb.

Following TPE with the Railway Children is akin to screening "The Railway Children" after "Taxi Driver". Picture the scene backstage as Mr Sheen, the boys' A&R man, scrubs behind their ears and combs their hair before gently pushing them towards the lights. And bloody hell! It's "Fool's Gold" again, limply pursued by a blurred rendering of their hit single, a number strangely similar to one of New Order's triter moments. Bring back The Pogguns. Bring back hanging. What a shame, I have to get the train before the set ends. **AWWW. DAVID BENNUN**

THE SANDKINGS / DROP TIC TOC CLUB, COVENTRY

THE arts of confrontation and sonic assault have found an awesome home in Drop. Theirs is a simple manifesto, marrying the percussive clatter of, say, Ride's "Unfamiliar" with the glorious cacophony of The Wedding Present's "Dolliance" and - somewhat less fortunately - Bad News's Vim Fuego wailing over the whole row. Still, Vim uses his aggression to finish off a job that your Gardeners and Geddes too often shy away from, screaming his sweet catharsis to fill every last bit of space, and Drop's anxiety becomes the audience's exhilaration.

Unlike some of their dim Black Country contemporaries, The Sandkings avoid singing in their spoken accents, opting instead for a big smiling welter of harmonies and chiming guitars. Unfortunately then, that those guitars should be fed through a small biscuit tin for most of the evening. However, with Jez careening about the stage like a kangaroo possessed, a few more things go unnoticed. Like the fact that half the time it's only enthusiasm that ensures the popularity of the newer material, and although "Temple Redneck" is nothing like the oafish clodge of the record, any sort of melody is painfully absent.

Then, as if to remind us of just how long it's been since a decent Sandkings single, "Circles" kick-starts into action, Jez's undeniably pretty face contorted around the funeral rhythm. If it's roughly around this point I realise that somehow if they could slap that naked enthusiasm onto plastic there may yet be hope for them. Three years ago The Sandkings were promising us the world. Three years on, and they're still promising. Hope springs eternal. **PETER PAPHIDES**



EVE ANGELICAL

ALL ABOUT EVE CAMDEN UNDERWORLD, LONDON

"GOTH R.I.P." says the lettering on All About Eve's backdrop, interwoven among all the pretty flowers. Well, hardly. Recent features promising a forthcoming sea change in their camp were highly misleading. The Eves' steady, winsome charms remain essentially unaltered. I reckon they've exorcised a few twice romantic concepts, but that's all. Stalwart fans aren't about to be shocked rigid.

I'm surprised, though, how easily I'm seduced tonight. I've never seen All About Eve as much more than a set of rambling pleasantries, a hippy-dippy diversion, for these delicately undulating songs have me hooked straightaway tonight. It's too hot to think in this heaving dungeon, but the immaculately cool Julianne smiles out serenely at her people and all is suddenly well with the world. Her poise can carry the Eves' gently flawed pastoral patterns, no bother. She radiates warmth. Shit, it's hot enough already.

I'm also nonplussed at how wrong the folk-rock label hoisted on to them is. It ain't true. There's a sense of community among the faithful, sure, but the Eves themselves are always once removed, glimmering with allure, weaving their unperturbant but pretty tales of mystery, folklore, witchcraft and other

discreet and tidy fables. I guess that's where the Goth notion comes in. We're never awed by Julianne; we just nestle under her spell. It's an easy, comfy capitulation.

So we meander through the meadows just like we knew we would. The rumoured razor-sharp rap in "Touched By Jesus" turns to be no more than Julianne enunciating sweetly in those Home Counties tones. "Goodbye Mr Sorrow" floats by on the (absent) breeze. "Here's a nice song!" and "This is a jolly little song!" she trills as intras to other new tracks. Goth R.I.P.? Well, All About Eve may be keen to lose those embarrassing goblin and bottersnikke references, but tonight is business as usual.

There's room for nostalgia; as the hordes clap patiently through a whole set of new gear, Julianne rewards them by returning and promising an old favourite. Tumultuous cheers. "Oh, you don't like the new album!" Julianne mock-mourns, and is rapidly reassured by the devoted before tumbling through "Every Angel", complete with confetti storm, and a spirited stab at The Beatles' "It's All Too Much". And we all trip off home, sandy-bay-frisky frisky little creatures that we are. What a NICE evening. **IAN GITTINS**

OPPOSITES X SELY PARK TAVERN, BIRMINGHAM

FRIENDS, family and ex-Fuzzboxers gather curiously at the low-key debut of Opposites X, the Frankenstein's Monster combo most recently assembled in the A&R dungeons at WEA. On vocals is Vicky Fuzzbox, ex-big sister to a thousand teenage wankers; on axe, Robin George, fresh from the collapse of the leathermetal Notorious, his hairy honeymoon of convenience with Sean out of Diamondhead. Will the camp-crazed indie heart hold out around

all those muscular buttocks? Or will the spare-parts reject and haemorrhage, leaving Opposites X sounding as dislocated and desperate as a Brummie TV Vamp? No fear. Some would call it a dialectical synthesis, others the result of good old happy compromise, but the cobbled crossover works wonders, stripping the dogbath sincerity out of Rob's Rock and giving Vicky's just-pretend naughtiness a welcome boost of musical ranch. She's all tarted up in stilettoes, leather hot-pants and lycra, and he fits in a fair few straight solos, but there's a mutual, undercutting sense of

absurdity that lifts Opposites X right out of the ordinary. Serious booby-bouncing and arse-wiggling is interspersed with bouts of crap student-disco frugging. Vicky sheds her leather jacket to the tune of "The Stripper", and gets her hand stuck in the sleeve. She greets applause earned by earnest mid-Seventies riffing with whoops of "Cheers, chief" and "Come on down!". A few more gigs, a few more fun songs and they'll be here. A passable cover of "Get It On" would instil them on "Wogan" tomorrow. **DJ SMITH**