

LIVE

Midnight Oil

Gluepot — August 18

Given that we are an isolated little island or two, it's good to be able to check a few Aussie bands from time to time. In this case, Midnight Oil, a fairly established outfit with two albums, opened a NZ tour with a week at the Gluepot.

Like a lot of Aussie rockers, Midnight Oil is rehearsed and slick, and make an effort at presenting the music well. Their twin guitar axis of James Moginie and Martin Rotsey borrows a lot from the various British art school and new wave factions, alternating choppy, disjointed rhythm guitar and guitar-hero raves. Peter Garrett takes his frontman role seriously. His huge frame and hairless head make him hard to miss.

Unfortunately, like a lot of the Aussie bands I've heard (on vinyl), they don't have great material. "Run By Night" (you saw it on *Radio With Pictures*) stands out from a set with few landmarks, as does "Used and Abused". But for a lot of the time the band is all sound and fury, with long numbers and little focus.

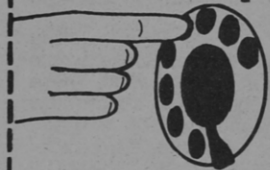
Garrett himself said, "People have not been able to categorise us." It may well be true. Midnight Oil seem to be an old-school band (the nucleus was formed in 1974) that has learned some but not all the lessons of the new wave. They still get boring in the middle of their long songs, filling them out with keyboard or guitar solos that add little. Garrett's delivery has the quirky, idiosyncratic feel of a Tim Finn vocal, with nothing in the music or the lyrics to justify his approach.

I could be wrong. A crowd of people left the Gluepot well pleased. But by now, I should know what I like. They were good, but they weren't brilliant.

John Malloy

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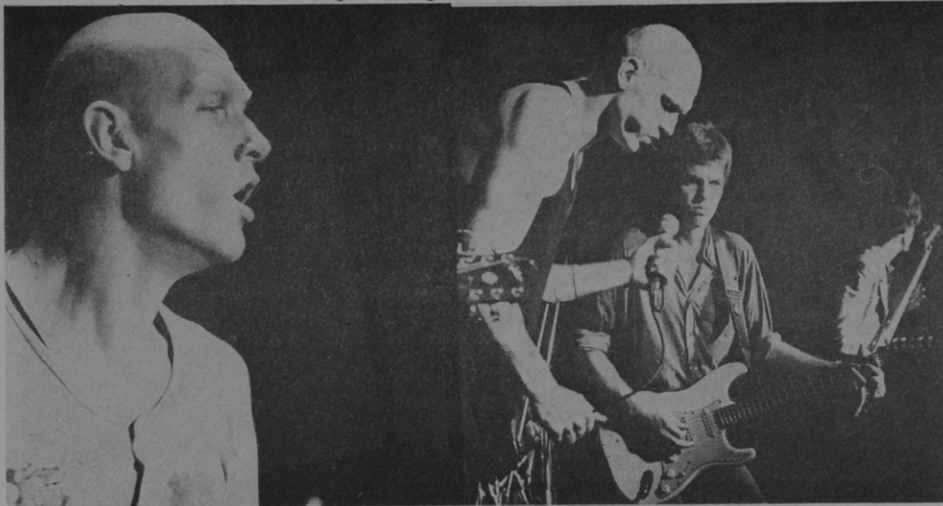
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STICK THIS TO BACK OF STEREO!

Peter Garrett and Martin Rotsey, Midnight Oil.



Midnight Oil, Shotgun, Sheerlux Mainstreet — August 21

The first 'Rock War' was a one-sided affair. Although Sheerlux got a good response from the audience with their mixture of covers and (greatly improved) originals, Shotgun found their 90 minutes a *real* battle. Their repertoire was dated and lacking in originals and energy.

Midnight Oil came on and immediately laid down their brand of relentless gut-level attack on the senses. The twin guitar sound is an exercise in perfect balance — Jim Moginie's Gibson has a clean sound of the guitar heroes of yore, while Martin Rotsey prefers to slash his Fender El Punko style. They're supported by Andrew James driving bass and the immaculate skinsmanship of Rob Hirst.

But the dominating force in the band is Peter Garrett, this great big bald brute shakes the very foundations as he careers around the stage like a demented marionette.

Sheer power is the secret to Midnight Oil's attraction. Not that there aren't faults. Moginie's occasional organ work is amateurish — although it is merely used ten fingered to fill out the sound, the music suffers with the loss of the second guitar — and some of the songs are too long.

But, what the hell, Midnight Oil won me over. 'Rock War'? Sorry NZ in Round One all honours to Australia.

John Dix

Sphinx Captain Cook Dunedin

Sphinx date from November last year and their press photos at the time showed four long-haired gents outfitted in Rick Wakeman styled threads. The press and record companies took one look at them and dubbed them as being old hat, consequently the band has been fighting this initial drawback ever since.

Short-haired and conventionally dressed they

displayed a touch of class and versatile musicianship at the Cook recently. Dividing their set into three brackets they began with their own material written mainly by guitarist/vocalist Gerard Carr. Their songs proved to be folk influenced (in accordance with Carr's background) and generally lengthy but impressive affairs (try "Flipside") containing contrasting elements and controlled climaxes.

Their other brackets featured mainly robust well-executed covers of Today's Music — "Heroes", "Just What I Needed" and a dead accurate version of "I'm Bored" when bassist Jos Hodzelmans handed his bass to keyboards player Mark Stanton and spat out the vocal.

It's unfortunate that Sphinx were branded as last years thing because they have enough going for them as a songwriting unit and as a live band to warrant attention. There is a place for long songs in our culture, isn't there?

See them when they come to your town.

George Kay

The B52s

Electric Ballroom, London — August 4.

Though you may have never heard the B52s, chances are you've heard of them. The B52s first UK appearance was at the Lyceum in July — neither their single nor their album had been released here, but the audience was the biggest they've had.

Four months ago the B52s had just appeared in New York's hippest magazine — Andy Warhol's *Interview* — and were being touted by *New York Rocker* as the hottest unsigned property on the East Coast. They were packing out clubs there largely on the strength of a peculiarly original first single which had sold 10,000 copies throughout America, England and Europe. "Rock Lobster" was a facile but amusing song which speedily endeared the B52s to critics and became a party hit among the in-crowd.

Tonight is little different from the band's Lyceum showing. True, the band (Fred Schneider, Ricky Wilson, Keith Strickland, Kate Pierson and Cindy Wilson) is noticeably less nervous. But from "Planet Claire" through "52 Girls", "606-0842", "The Devil's In My Car" and "Hot Lava" the songs are all too damn formulaised — one listen to "Rock Lobster" and you know the pattern. Look instead for lyrical depth and you're met with glibness:

There's a moon in the sky,

It's called the Moon ...

The B52s run on smoothly until halfway through a particularly tortuous version of "Downtown" (in which the B52s owe more to Patti Smith than Petula Clark). Then comes the evening's only surprise. Somebody pulls the plug.

But the show went on. "Moon in the Sky", "Running Around" and (the closest and best copy of "Rock Lobster") "Dance This Mess Around". "Lobster" ends the show. "(Living In Your Own) Private Idaho" is the encore.

And what did you expect?

Fashion dictates. And who are more fashionable than the B52s, a group you *have* to dress up to go see? If anybody expected more than a rehash of the sublime silliness of "Rock Lobster" then perhaps they deserved to be disappointed. The B52s are named after the hairdo (those silly Brenda Lee bouffants Kate and Cindy wear), not the bomber.

Can you do the B52?

Then do it while you can.

Jeremy Templer

Snipes

The Windsors

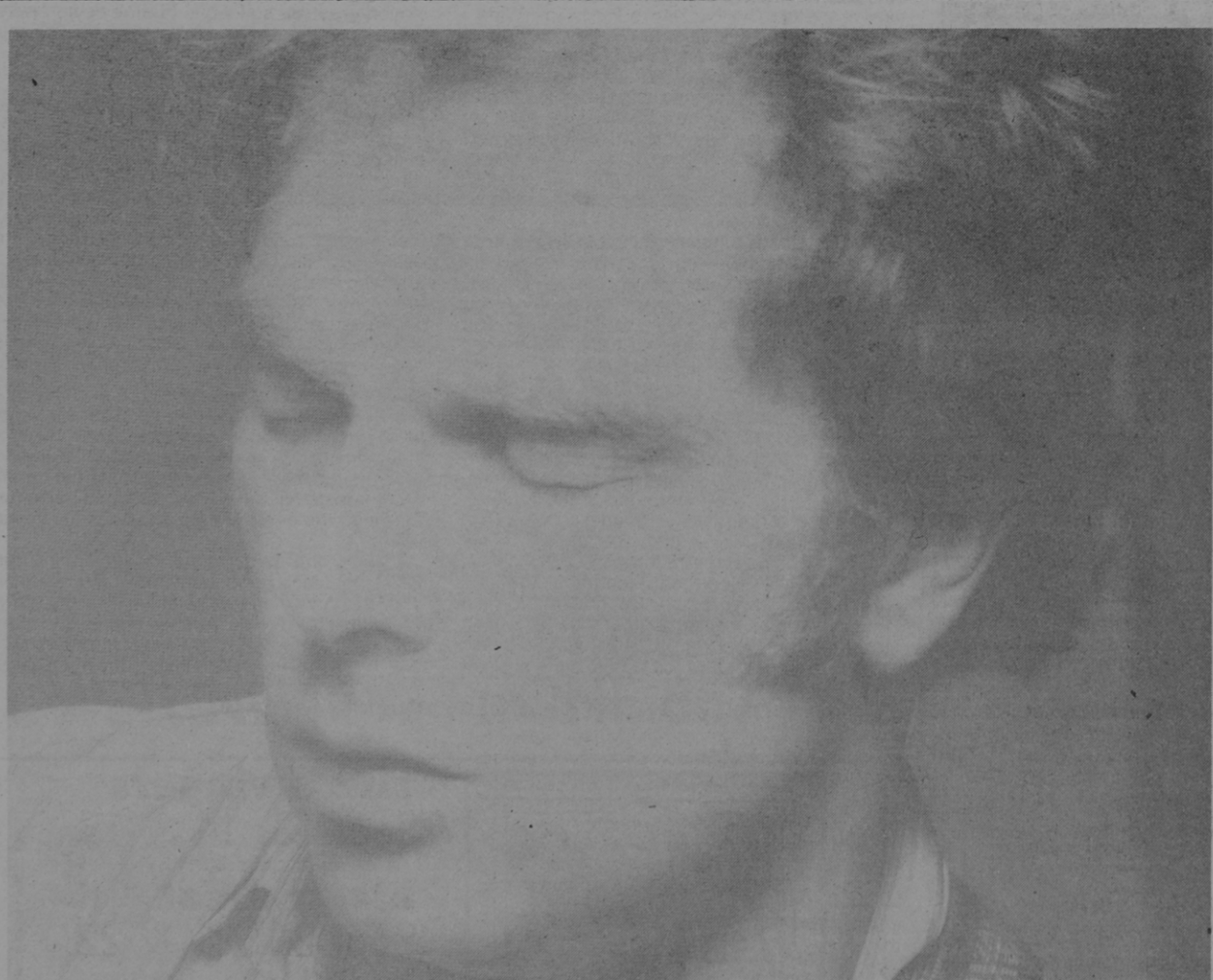
One thing there is always room for is a non-sense rhythm'n'blues band and Snipes are top candidates at the moment. Probably the reasons why there is always room in the R'n'B field are that it's hard work and also risky because it's difficult to be no-nonsense without being plain boring. Snipes are smart enough to tread the familiar no frills path with enough flair to keep it interesting.

No surprise is the fact that they play R'n'B standards with the odd '60s classic thrown in. In time honoured fashion they keep the playing and presentation simple, the pace fast and the volume up. Clearly a formula which should be close to the heart of any pub rock fan.

In the rhythm section Allan Evans (bass) and Norman Knot (drums) keep it hard and steady and guitarist Simon Lynch capably handles both rhythm and lead work. The vocals of Glen McLean are suitably tough and visually he does Graham Parker proud (sunglasses worn like an old hand at the game).

To really avoid the perils of the no frills approach Snipes could opt for more movement on stage and less terseness in introducing their numbers. But minor criticism aside this outfit is alright. So if you like a lot of R'n'B and no nonsense, Snipes are a good bet.

Dominic Free

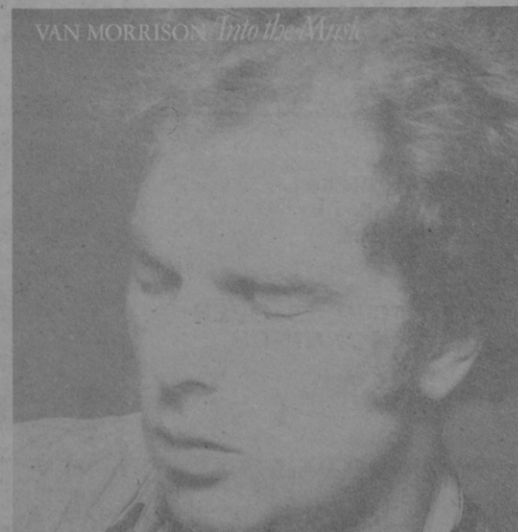


Few singers in contemporary music can put out as much excitement or sing with the abandon as Van 'The Man' when he has a horn section behind him.

Happily, on *Into The Music* Van has horns and that swirling violin of his *Astral Weeks* period augmenting his fabulous Irish blue-eyed soul vocals.

Two emotion filled epics, "And the Healing has Begun" and "You Know They're Writing About" are the showcase tunes on the album.

Cashbox, Sept. 1, 1979



VAN MORRISON/Into the Music

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