

Live

**RUN DMC
DEREK B**
Powerstation, November 15
Jesus, it was great. Better than drugs or sex. The "lives!" rock show I've ever seen, with the best audience I've ever been in. You didn't need any degrees in rapology to enjoy this jam, it was in effect, totally.

Derek B is a superstar. With 'Bullet From A Gun,' 'Good Groove,' 'Get Down,' and 'Bad Young Brother' he had the crowd yelling the chorus, and taught us how to say "motherfucker." Very much the Eddie Murphy school of crowd control, with lots of Say Yo and Ho between the slabs of great rap. Derek almost lost the show to his DJ Scratch, who was strictly business on the turntables. This is what a lot of the crowd came to see, the mixing between the black discs, that great sonic noise when Scratch spun the records against the needle. Great stuff, especially that dramatic foot on the turntable move. Just loved that belt he wore, just like the one Honky Tonk Man wears as the greatest living intercontinental WWF champion of all time. More gold than an Aztec.

The crowd just lapped it up, shouting and moving to the beat, Derek looked good and impressed everybody. After a bit he moved in with the audience, talking to people — rap democracy in action.

Okay, it's time for the big boys, Run DMC and Jam Master Jay, who told us in no certain terms just whose house it was. It was indeed 'Run's House' which opened a non-stop attack on our sensibilities. Anything but the old men of rap, they kicked the shit of any rock band. It was in the way Jam Master Jay worked the wheels of steel, just like a drummer, he slammed down the beat, solid as a rock. Highlights included 'Mary Mary,' 'Walk This Way,' 'Tougher Than Leather,' and by far the best, 'Kings of Rock.' Like Derek B, they involved the audience in everything, with the constant Say Ho, and Whose House? They kept everyone on the edge.

Best thing about it was being able to see live hip hop, and see what you missed out on the records.

The week before at the same venue, a local rap competition was held with

some very impressive crews. Like Guy, who came third with a rap over Klymax's 'Miss You,' and 'Monster House' who came second with great vocals. First came Semi MCs with a good rap style and neat human beatbox. Lots of talent also in Total Effect, DJ Mark in Homeboys, Ski Down Productions and the rest. It was cool to see local hip hop and record companies should grab some talent soon.

Double concert of the year. Hope we see more of it.
KERRY BUCHANAN

THE GREG JOHNSON SET Berlin, November 30

The Friday prior to the GJ Set gig had seen one of Club Berlin's better floorshows complete with running DJs, exploding owners and flying vinyl, but this Wednesday it was back to business as usual. Greg Johnson began as This Boy Rob but now records under his own name. The Greg Johnson Set drew their moniker from the presence of two Car Crash survivors in the band: Nigel Russell played keyboards and Trevor Reekie got time off from the office to play guitar.

The opening songs were quiet and melodic and suited the club (which is always too small). Johnson's apologies for the lack of tempo were unnecessary — the change of pace was welcome. His best songs so far have been in the same vein, complex, street-smart melodies touching on 'Cadence & Cascade' as much as on Bill Nelson and 'Ladytron'. Best song of the evening was called (I think) 'Searching For Atlantis.' I don't recall hearing the nifty 'Shirt And Tie Man' but new songs recalled the same whimsicality. There were no covers, no swipes from the VU, and tentative forays into funk, the bassist settling during the latter into a slinky Dali's Car line. The dalek drummer made two false starts, but everyone coped.

If Greg Johnson trips up, it's because he aims high, mixing pop and melancholy with a jazz-styled trumpet and often ambient guitar. The songs are long and hugely inventive, a treat at a time when one-note funk and one-note thrash are in style; his task now is knitting those parts together. What he doesn't need (as has been suggested, I hear) is a mercenary commercial producer. And he doesn't need to apologise for the slow bits. And a drummer would be nice. Everything else seems dandy and fine.
CHAD TAYLOR

Listening In CASSANDRA'S EARS



Cassandra's Ears (L-R) are Venessa Anich, Jan Hellviegall, Zan Wright, Flick Rhind and Leanne Ibell.

In three years of existence Cassandra's Ears have survived lineup changes, dreadful southern recording studios and a nightclub audience expecting ZZ Top covers. Now with an excellent debut EP out on Jayrem things must surely be looking up...

"Well, quite frankly I think we should all just go and join covers bands," says songwriter/guitarist/singer Jan Hellviegall. Fortunately for local music she speaks in jest, but there must have been times when she was tempted. Being asked to stop playing by

nightclub staff is something a band of the Ears' quality shouldn't have to put up with. On the other hand there's been support from the least likely of quarters: "There's lots of people outside the main centres who like to hear original music, which is quite amazing really. There's a place on the Coromandel called Colville where they're really receptive to what's going on."

Cassandra's Ears were formed three years ago when Jan decided to play at the Dunedin Womens' Festival, and asked her neighbours at an Otago University Cafe table to form a band with her. They learned to play their instruments in two weeks. Since then they've played countless gigs,

contributed a song to the less than memorable *Weird Culture* *Weird Custom* student radio compilation, moved from Dunedin to Auckland and last released their *Private Wasteland* EP.

The Dunedin-Auckland pilgrimage is one many of the country's best bands have made, despite the fact that at times Auckland's good live venues could almost have been counted on the nails of one finger. Jan says she found the Auckland scene quite good.

"The audiences are really good, and lots of venues keep popping up all over the place. Then they die again, but there are some there." Dunedin, she says, also has a good scene, but it's different. "There's only the Oriental as a medium-sized venue for bands like us. But you can play down there and even if no-one knows you you'll get someone coming along to see you, just to see what it's like."

Jan writes all the group's material herself, and on the evidence of the record is clearly a talented songwriter. "I can't be bothered about writing about things that people have written about a lot before," she says. "Most of my songs are taken directly from New Zealand and, I s'pose, life is social, political."

The most directly political song on the EP is 'Worker's Lament,' and it's one of the best, musically and lyrically. "Yeah, it's quite funny," says Jan, "so many people have different ways of approaching what that song means. The way I think of it is totally different from the way everyone else thinks, but that's alright. Some critics are going on about how it's about me not having any time to do any creative stuff, but it's actually to do with working people just never having time to explore the "important" things in life.

And getting criticised — like when I was at varsity lots of people were ready to point the finger at these people not living the way they want, when they just don't have time to sit around in a cafe and smoke and sip coffee and discuss the latest popular politics. But I s'pose if you're going to listen to a song then your own interpretation is probably the right one. I don't really mind what people think the lyrics are about, although I'll dispute it if they really want me to."

Jan was brought up listening to disco and Neil Young but at the moment New Zealand music is the biggest influence on her writing.

"I can just put my finger on it, relate to it a lot better than I can to all those drum machines and funky roosters or whatever they're called. But who knows, next week I might be into symphonies or Mantronix if I could afford the gear."

Although Cassandra's Ears' vocal harmonies give the group their distinctive sound the lyrics are written with the melodies, not as an after-thought.

"When I write a song it all sort of pops out at the same time. I sometimes wonder if I haven't actually written any of it, y'know, because it just happens. I don't really think about it beforehand. But who knows what happens in the metaphysical world?"

Who indeed. But while divine inspiration remains a mystery, it's a safe bet that the album Cassandra's Ears will be recording next March will contain some of the best melodic pop songs of 1989. "My wish is my command" goes one of the songs on *Private Wasteland*. Cassandra's Ears are a band with the potential to make their every command come true.

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