

Live

ALANIS MORISSETTE, DEAD FLOWERS
North Shore Events Centre, Auckland, May 7.

It's a funny old town. Before Alanis Morissette crossed over into superstar territory, the only radio station playing her music in Auckland was 95bFM. However, she didn't last long on the playlist once the momentum kicked in, and now Morissette is the butt of jokes on two b promo ads.

Anyway, it was a very young crowd of probable and potential b listeners that arrived to pack out the North Shore Events Centre this wet Tuesday night. Many would have been witnessing the Dead Flowers live for the first time, and for the Flowers it was another swing up the learning curve, as they become accustomed to a handful of new songs and life as a four-piece. Mammoth queues outside ensured they were well into their set when I shuffled in to see 'Dead Boy' had the front rows jumping. With Damon, Rob and Aaron firing behind him, Bryan Bell looked happily in control this evening, behaving in a manner that suggested he was fronting the headlining act as opposed to the support band. You had to grin. Then when Dead Flowers leapt into the next song, a heavenly new pop tune called 'I Really Want', there was every reason to smile from ear to ear. Built on a vocal melody of monumental proportions, it's quite possibly the most wonderful song they've written to date. "This is our last one, sorry things are running late, Alanis took longer than she expected at the movies," announced Bell, before tearing into a super-heavy performance of 'Not Ready'. Very cool stuff.

How Alanis Morissette managed to convince me, through videos and photographs, her legs stretched to heaven, I'll never understand, 'cause striding about up there on stage, there's only five foot nothing of her. Kicking off with 'All I Really Want' was a divinely played ace, ensuring the hopelessly devoted audience would start and finish at a fever pitch.

With her slick backing band (including ex-Chili Pepper Jessie Tobias on guitar), whose look was that of movie extras from *Point Break*, Morissette stormed through faithful versions of 'Not the

Doctor', 'Hand in My Pocket', 'Mary Jane', and 'Head Over Feet', and often that's where my main reservations were founded. Too much of her set was played identically to *Jagged Little Pill*, lacking any hint of the fire that can make a live gig overwhelming. Though, in Morissette's defence, this was due more to the intermittent musical woodenness of the three Cali-dudes, as her voice never stopped soaring and swooping for a second.

The highlight came the song before the encore. 'Ironic' was explosive, and carried the impact of a sledgehammer between the eyes. Seven-thousand-and-one voices belting out the chorus, 'It's like rain...' was a sound just out of this world, though Morissette responded as though she heard it every night (ie. not at all).

Back with the band for 'You Learn', and Alanis clambered up on the drum riser to beat up a few cymbals, then stepped solo into a single spotlight for 'Forgive Me Love', *Jagged Little Pill's* secret closing track, and only then did everything *truly* make sense. I left believing, despite the infectious fanfare and hoopla tonight, Morissette's voice and songs would be more suited to a tiny venue, in front of a tiny audience, on a tiny stage too small for a band, where they could be heard as they were written. Fat chance.

JOHN RUSSELL

SMASHING PUMPKINS, GARAGELAND
Mt Smart Supertop, Auckland, May 23.

I'm arriving at the damp, leaking Supertop, and Garageland have already opened with 'Fay Wray' — another one of those great songs they pissed away as a B-side. The crowd seem oblivious towards the new single, 'Beelines to Heaven', a cutesy departure from their head-nodding, chorus kicking singles. Hopefully the warning bells are sounding. 'Comeback' and 'Fingerpops' both get huge roars from the crowd. They're the highlights of the set, as they were at *Nunfest*. The tracks off their new album, like 'Nude Star', probably need a few more listens for the hooks to catch.

The band themselves looked scared stiff, possums in a Holden's headlights. Shame really, because it meant their stage presence was seriously lacking. When they provide a show as good as their songs, they'll be massive.

Anyone lucky enough to be in the mosh pit 'section' was treated to an amazing half-time crowd crush ballet. Under harsh fluoro lights, hundreds of kids were being pulled out of the steaming, squirming mass of greasy hair and wet t-shirts to the sound of Henryk Gorecki's Symphony No. 3. Ominous cellos bellowing out of the speakers as

bouncers struggled to save the fearful young kids who'd got more than they bargained for.

Billy walks out, silver pants and Zero T-shirt, composed and ready to rock. D'arcy, having jumped up the sexy scale since she was last here, grabs our attention, the beauty and the bass. Jimmy's ready to bash those drums into submission, James Iha is primed to operate his guitar with geek chic. Their new "cyber metal of the future" look could've done with more than the average light show and the psychedelic back projections provided, but that's a small complaint amongst two-and-a-quarter hours of Pashing Munchkin brilliance.

The screeching version of 'Today' gave us an idea of what we were in for. No time for melancholy or sadness. 'Zero's chant of, 'Emptiness is loneliness, and loneliness is cleanliness, and cleanliness is godliness, and god is empty, just like me!', received a huuuuuge chant from the audience, like some sort of rock religion. It's the next single and it deserves to be Number bloody 1. 'Disarm' was poignant, with Billy on acoustic and 12,000 people singing every word, 'the killer in me is the killer in you...' — but then, they could've been singing along to every song, the band were so loud you'd never know!

The Supertop got a nod with cute TV sample — 'Welcome to *Howdy Doody's* greatest circus on earth,' after which Billy launched into 'Bullet With Butterfly Wings' with, 'Doody is a vampire'. The stadium, quite rightly, went mad. Steam wafted over the packed crowd like mustard gas, as 'Jellybelly' kicked big hairy ass, and they ended the first set with 'Cherub Rock', which was almost buried amongst the other great tracks. In the old days it would have been the climax, but they've come so far since *Siamese Dream* and that great *Big Day Out* performance. We're talking brilliance now.

For the first encore, James comes out and whines: "Hey, Auckland, yuuur rawkin' meeee." Big laugh. They played '1979', with these circle lights all over the place, and it was bloody 1979. Yup, we were there, baby — the safe sex, easy drugs, naive materialism and the freaks were one step closer to ruling the earth.

The playfulness of the band and the buzz of excitement from the fans made this an amazingly intimate gig. Sure, the band were huge, they were stars, but they still dicked around and made us laugh. James Iha was the class clown, with his pogo demonstration and his 'Jimmy motherfuckin Barnes' blues jam. They were having big, geeky, stupid rock fun — and so were we.

For the second encore they launched into the thundering 'XYU', with rocket take-off visuals and, 'She didn't wanna be, she didn't wanna know, she couldn't run away 'cause she was crazy'. It was huu-

uge, jumping and stomping all over the place. The only thing missing were the rockets being fired from guitars. Then they completely swing the mood to accommodate the soft, pleading, brilliant 'Mayonnaise'.

The third encore saw the menacing, pained 'Bodies' ('Love is suicide') bleed into a 25-minute rock fest — bass rippling through your chest, drum solos, meandering guitar rituals. Most of the crowd stood dazed, but the rest of us felt like we were breathing in rock 'n' roll. It was music to fly attack helicopters to.

It all ended, appropriately enough, with 'Farewell and Goodnight'. D'arcy (sigh) singing in her silver top, cuddling a white teddy bear (lucky bastard) while the rest of the band took turns at singing like the rock Osmonds around the campfire.

Billy had the last word, "Goodnight, you crazy motherfuckers", and it was over. The crowd had arrived excited and full of spunk, and they left limp and satisfied, with the sound of Xanadu in their ears. There was magic at Mt Smart tonight, and if you missed it, you really missed out.

JOHN TAITE

SHIHAD, BACONFOOT, LETTERBOX LAMBS
James Cabaret, Wellington, May 17.

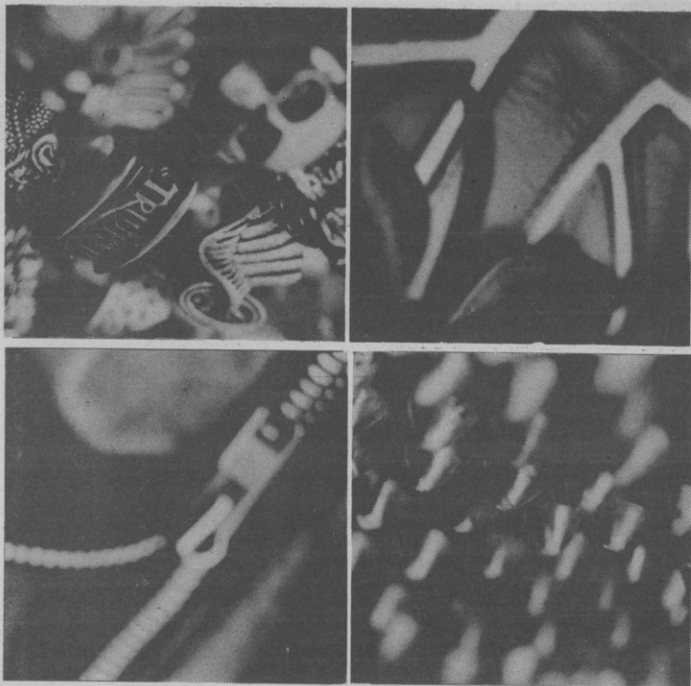
Sometimes first impressions aren't always the right ones, and mercifully this is so. When the Letterbox Lambs hopped on stage and settled in, my eyes rolled and I prepared to endure yet another bunch of irritatingly quirky, positively Wellington, funsters. Fuck was I wrong! Once the first tune was over, this foursome spent the next 20 minutes assaulting my senses with a set of songs overflowing with thrashy pop melodies and sharp guitar dynamics, that on occasion recalled the wilder moments of the Dunedin Ds. Bloody ace first time up.

A month earlier, Baconfoot travelled to Auckland and ran through a set of practice room in-jokes that should never have been heard beyond those four walls. But last night in Palmy, and tonight in Welli, Baconfoot simply rocked. With Date and Tom of HLAH upfront, and Craig of Scote keeping the groove, Baconfoot growled, bellowed, and stomped their way through a series of lo-fi, bluesy non-songs. If they're looking for a hit single, search no further than 'Slurpin' Good Coffee', a healthy red-neck singalong if ever I've heard one, and ditto the frantic finisher 'Meathead'. I'm sold.

Well okay and yee ha! Shihad on their home turf with a bunch of new songs, and a personal feeling that it rarely gets better than this. The applause is thunderous as they line up, like a million jandals

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