

>could decide if they should stay or go.

Mercifully, the Aussies loosened up as they crossed each song off the set list. And what of the songs? Both 'Don't Kill Nipper' and 'Jasper' were too similar to any early Soundgarden track you care to mention; 'Calypso' and 'Goosh', the squeaky bubblegum tunes sung by bassist Janet hark back to Juliana Hatfield's repulsive, feigned tweeness, and the Throwing Muses are painted all over, 'Hot Water & Milk'.

That said, Spiderbait did have awesome moments, but only one of them was a whole song. In other words, Spiderbait were good at bits — specifically, the bass line in the otherwise dull grunge number, 'Chest Hair', and the vocal trickery courtesy of Kram on 'Conjunctivitis'. Their finest song tonight was a hypnotic instrumental, 'When Fusion Ruled the Earth'. Just before the finale, I felt a conclusion coming on; Spiderbait are essentially a combination of a handful of in-denial MOR guitar bands, none of whom I particularly wish to listen to. SB were okay, but I'm grateful it was F-R-E-E. Some people asked after the whereabouts of the encore, for me the more pressing question was, who paid for the free shows? Was it the record company? Or will Spiderbait be washing dishes at Polydor for many years to come?

JOHN RUSSELL

PALACE TALL DWARFS RENDERERS

@Luna, Auckland February 14

I'm late, but fortunately so are the Renderers. @Luna has had a cosmic makeover, which looks fine, but it's a little unclear what the rings of connected polystyrene are above the stage — a UFO or a stairway to heaven? In any case, once the Renderers are playing this is of little consequence. The band have a knack of drawing an audience into their often sombre but always soothing world, and leaving them feeling better for the experience. When the otherworldly Maryrose sings about pain, it somehow seems more real than the contrived soft focus melancholy of Mazzy Star's Hope Sandoval (you've sold millions of records honey, go buy yourself some Prozac). The performance is complimented by nice vocal harmonies from bassist Denise Roughan (of the 3Ds), and aside from a couple of guitar solos that sound a little out of tune, the country-tinged Southerners start the evening's entertainment real nice, like, good buddy.

Tall Dwarfs next — can they beat their BDO performance? Do they care? Once again 'Nothing's Going to Happen' works its magic alongside *Stumpy* material and a surprise in the form of 'Woman', which I've never seen them perform. Warm fuzziest lyrical soundbite: 'All I ever wanted you to do was smile.' Best modern primitive dancing ritual is performed by a punter who combines expressive movements with plenty of alcohol and a broken jandal. Most convincing Eddie Van

Halen impression: 'Lightning Fingers' Knox, on his custom piece of Deka-grade electronics. Tonight's incarnation of Palace consists of Will Oldham backed by the Renderers and an American pal on keyboards. Will looks like a cross between a leprechaun and Beck's twin brother, the one who wasn't allowed to play with the drum machine in his youth and didn't discover the strange mental effects of sniffing petrol. Soon after the band begins, his strengths as a songwriter and performer are clearly evident. The songs are simple, honest and moving, avoiding grandiose subject matter in favour of more down-to-earth content like working hard, playing hard, friends, family and God being the answer. Oldham sings with his mouth open as wide as Björk's, and the confidence of one who appreciates the qualities in his voice that others may call deficiencies; the distinctive waver only ever serves to heighten his performance. As the last show of this New Zealand tour concludes, Oldham gallantly shows his appreciation to the audience and his band with low bows and everyone leaves with a smile on their face.

JUSTIN REDDING

STEVE VAI BLACKJACK

Powerstation Auckland
February 16

Ticketless hopefuls waited outside in vain as the capacity crowd inside readied themselves for a night of guitar heaven. A hastily assembled version of Blackjack (with drummer Aland Grady from Knightshade) got things rocking and warmed up well with a solid set of mainly original songs. Hailing from Hamilton, they are known solely as a metal band yet it was their ballad which came across best, with Paul Martin adding some good lead fills.

At 10.30 the lights dimmed and the sirens signalled the powerful intro to 'There's a Fire in the House'. Steve got his guitar to say "hello" to everybody, and the band let rip with some intense musicianship. This was obviously going to be a very loud show of wicked proportions and the audience were not only listening, they were going nuts! Bassist Philip Byno laid down the heavy groove of 'The Animal' on his Yamaha six-string, with Vai playing so hard on it he broke one of his strings. He had to change guitars quite a few times throughout the night for this reason. 'Deepness' was the first number to feature Steve singing (in a scat vocal), as a prelude to the incredibly heartfelt performance of 'Tender Surrender'. He was wringing tears out of that Ibanez as if the future of the world depended on it. Later he played likewise on his piece de résistance, 'For the Love of God', lifting the mood to a higher spiritual level.

After the whammy bar wildness of 'Bad Horsie', Vai and fellow ex-Zappa man Mike Keneally went into a superbly staged extended guitar duel, *à la* *Crossroads*, where the fretboards were burning hot. A hilarious theatrical piece ensued during 'Answers', when two lucky participants were invited on stage and sprinkled with

invisible magic music dust. They now held the power to conduct the band by their movements, with bizarre, cacophonous results! Another memorable moment from the two-hour concert was when Vai let himself fall onto the fans and be carried along by their sea of hands.

The only minor quibble is that they could have played a Frank Zappa tune instead of 'Twist and Shout' and the inappropriate 'Waltzing Matilda'. The bulk of the material was from *Fire Garden* and *Passion and Warfare* (nothing from *Sex and Religion*), but to finish off there was a stunning rendition of 'The Attitude Song' from *Flex-able*. Despite an unsuccessful plea for the return of his stolen shoe, Steve looked very happy and genuinely blown-away by the enthusiastic reception he got from the Auckland audience. Let's hope he visits our planet again before the next millennium.

GEOFF DUNN

NONPLACE URBAN FIELD UNITONE HI-FI PITCH BLACK

214 K' Road Auckland
January 31

Friday night, Auckland city. At the Supertop Kiss are slobbering their way through a set of sonic tongue-dive, and an accountant wearing a 'Hooters' T-shirt reigns supreme on the dancefloor of the Loaded Hog. None of which matters to those who have come to K' Road to re-calibrate their internal compasses with a few bin-fulls of bass. Within seconds perspiration glistens on those who enter the fast overcrowding sub-pavement venue, whether they are moving or not. Laying down the soundtrack for this sweat-fest is Pitch Black, featuring Mike Hodgson of Projector Mix and Paddy Free from Mesh. Pitch Black's short set is a hit; their sound is simple but completely effective. What's more, the two of them appear to be totally getting off on it, and are grooving as hard as the rest of us.

Stinky Jim throws on a couple of records as yet more punters fill the space and oxygen becomes a fading memory. Just to ensure we all suffocate, Unitone HiFi soon kick in with material from new album *Boomshot*, including 'Natural Progression' and 'Race Horse'. From this blunted beginning the threesome slowly wind up the pace until the beats owe more to a rave than a dancehall. In fact the HiFi are pulling a fast one — changing pseudonyms half way through their set, the tricky buggers. They end up as their alter-egos the Crazy Baldheads and pound the crowd into a frenzy with a remix of their Incoming! labelmates Cee-Mix, among other nasties. A perfectly paced set, easily the best I've witnessed from them to date.

One of Unitone's last numbers went by the name of 'Friedman', an ode to Burned Friedman, aka Nonplace Urban Field, also an Incoming! artist from Germany, and tonight's last act. NUF's recorded output is nothing short of excellent, but I couldn't help but wonder how it would be received here tonight. Burned begins with an explanation of what exactly he is about to do, which doesn't really leave anyone the wiser due to the mic being turned down too low. After a pastiche of pretty out-there noise, which although interesting left a few a little confused, NUF delivers a deeply layered collection of tracks. The night had really peaked with the previous act but this was a great way to continue: diverse rhythms with plenty of ambience over the top. NUF's style may have challenged the audience a little more than they were expecting, but if you're going to go to sound-system style gigs you're going to have to expect some weird shit sooner or later. All in all a great gig in a venue that unfortunately is now a pool hall. Still, with over a hundred turned away at the door, Unitone Hi-Fi and friends will be needing somewhere bigger next time.

JUSTIN REDDING

Lionel Tap

Heroes on Parade

So, your heroes turn up in Auckland, your bubblegum heroes from the sweaty days of being a teenybopper and hugging your gatefold sleeve, live double-album. Those vinyl days, the days of KISS. You were too young to go to their show last time they were in town, and now you're too old. But you do it anyway. You don't bother with the makeup, but you have the money to buy at least two T-shirt designs.

They were always a kids' band, so it's bizarre now the kids have grown up, they still want to see KISS parade all their original comic book kitsch. As a grown kid you can rationalise that it's all about the music, the good songs — 'I Was Made For Loving You', 'Rock 'n' Roll All Nite' (note the youthful, rebellious spelling of *nite*) — however, the reasons you went to the show were:

1. blood
2. tongue
3. fire
4. explosions
5. platform shoes

The band tried to grow up like their fans and take off the makeup, and they tried to be taken seriously. It was tough, everyone said KISS were really ugly when they took their makeup off but really they weren't that ugly. I guess Ace Frehley has always had a skin problem, but the other guys...

However, by the end of the 80s, KISS had paled into insignificance beside the decade's new heroes — POISON, MOTLEY CRUE and BON JOVI. But they were not ready to be put out to pasture; KISS got in younger, spunkier players, they worked out at the gym and they put holes in the knees of their jeans, but it still didn't happen. GENE SIMMONS was seen with DIANA ROSS in the tabloids, and then he was seen with CHER and his collection of intimate polaroids, the measure of his manhood, kept getting bigger. But the fans stayed away. Our heroes who once had their own KISS Army, were reduced to doing acoustic sets at KISS fan conventions.

However, when original KISS members GENE SIMMONS and PAUL STANLEY announced, "We're putting the old band together," the response was deafening: "I thought he was dead!"

"But isn't he dead?"

Yes, they exhumed ACE FREHLEY and PETER CRISS out of the pits of suburbia, gave them a personal trainer and put them on a wage. And suddenly the reincarnated KISS are the biggest drawing band in the world.

I guess, now they're older, getting back into the makeup is a good idea. And what a bloody good idea it has proven to be in money terms. A year or so later, PETER CRISS and ACE FREHLEY (the employees) are still with the KISS machine as it moves around the globe, so SIMMONS and STANLEY (the employers) chose to pay off (make redundant) the younger and spunkier members of KISS, who were growing tired of waiting for the reunion to falter.

Although PETER CRISS is not one of the world's better drummers, he knows where he's at, sometimes. In the foyer of his Auckland hotel, he's asked, "How are you enjoying New York?" He replies, "I'm lovin' it man, it's great."

GENE SIMMONS is never lacking in wit and charm. He's positively awake for his bFM breakfast show interview with MIKEY HAVOC; and later that day when a woman approaches him in the foyer of the Stamford Plaza Hotel and says, "I think you're great," ever the gentleman, SIMMONS lifts up her dress, looks down and replies, "I think you're wonderful too."

And the highlights of the Auckland KISS show were:

1. The blood.
2. ACE FREHLEY doing his brilliant solo track 'New York Groove'.
3. The tongue.
4. Disco's first-equal finest moment, 'I Was Made For Loving You'.
5. The fire.
6. The choreographed three guitarists' moves.
7. The explosions.
8. The pyrotechnic that shot down a lamp from the lighting rig.
9. GENE'S best 'leg on monitor' pose since COURTNEY LOVE.
10. The final song, 'Rock 'n' Roll All Nite'.

Time has not made 'Love Gun' any better but the 40-something KISS successfully completed their delicate balance between pyrotechnics and exposed body hair without personal injury. How do they hold it all together? SIMMONS and STANLEY have recruited former BON JOVI manager DOC MCGHEE to work for them.

After the show in the bar of the Stamford Plaza Hotel, ACE FREHLEY is playing with some audio gadget while DOC MCGHEE is the life of the party. The diminutive, aging McGhee is puffing on his large \$100 cigar, or \$150 cigar, depending on who he's talking to. The price makes musicians BRYAN BELL (DEAD FLOWERS not WEEZER) and RONNY GROWLER (PASH) instant converts to the idea of smoking something so expensive, so MCGHEE lights them a cigar to share and boasts that his management company has signed, "This unknown hip-hop artist from England called TRICKY."

MCGHEE recalls their groundbreaking New York promo gig, where TRICKY performed without lights with his back to the audience.

"No one fuckin' got it," says MCGHEE, "but I love that shit."

When PAUL STANLEY hits the hotel bar after the gig, he is wearing a hat with some but not a lot of hair in evidence. What happened to that big mane of hair he had on stage? It seems PAUL does a TINA TURNER every night and puts his stage wiggy back in a box when he returns to his hotel.

A few weeks after the KISS show, and it's time for local heroes to hit the streets for the *Hero Parade* down Ponsonby Road, one of the few events where Inner City Auckland comes out and plays.

Whether it was initially merely a practical solution to moving the parade or not, the *Hero Parade's* inimitable large trucks do give the this parade something the *Farmers' Parade* [now known as *Santa's Parade*] never had, a certain phallic quality. Their size, their sheer bulk, as they ominously motor along Ponsonby Road. And there's the really big one with the big hood emblazoned with 'MACK'.

"Michelle's on this float," says the guy standing next to me. And another truck, all guys with or without the extras, rolls by.

Even the names of the trucking firms contribute a little something — 'Eastern Haulage', 'Machinery Movers Ltd.' and there's SPQR's memorable BIG MACK from 'Mainfreight'.

As another truck looms into view, "Michelle's on this float," says the guy standing next to me. How can he tell?

Bad taste modern dance music was plentiful on the night, although an early float featured the remixed MOANA's 'A.E.I.O.U. (Akona Te Reo)', and the parade's theme song DAVID BOWIE's 'Heroes' was there too.

As another truck looms into view, "This is a straight float," says the guy standing next to me. How can he tell?

Well, navigating by the stars, I'm due north-east of Kentucky Fried Chicken, in a direct line with Liquor King, and my glass is empty and all the trucks have stopped. One thing you could say about the *Farmers' Parade*, they had the rhythm right, the parade never stopped.

All these big trucks idling six feet apart is too much for me, so I retreat to the barbie's kitchen to top up the tippie, passing a pop star asleep on a couch by the backyard clothesline. JOSH THORAZINE, I presume, "Life is passing you by — well, life is actually parked outside, idling in the middle of the bloody road."

In the time it takes to pour a wine, I get to counsel a Steinlager drinker at the sink to whom I have to explain, "Just because those two women told you to fuck off, they're not necessarily lesbians."

Back to the footpath and even the post-*Priscilla* buses are no match for the cool of the MACK. The parade highlights were:

1. The live Pacific Island drums.
2. The male marching team.
3. Madam Kitty's big truck.

What happened to the women's marching team? Did they take a wrong turn down Franklin Road?

LIONEL TAP

NEW SINGLE

'PLAY DUMB'

BY

PROPELLER

(FORMERLY SEMI LEMON KOLA)

OUT NOW

chronic

FUNNY HOW THINGS TURN OUT