

METAL AS ANYTHING

My musical taste went kerrang the day I saw Axl Rose winched into latex trousers, caressing the mike, his hair wild as a tomcat, screeching 'Welcome to the Jungle'. That poignant moment in the video when he arrives in LA as a seventeen year old, baseball cap on the back of his head, a bundle of frustrated desires from Indiana waiting to explode in LA. So romantic, rebellious and iconoclastic: a young man angry about nothing except his frustrated will to be wild.

This is the allure of the current metal craze, which is not so much heavy as hard, fast and glamorous. Heavy metal is an outmoded term, implying depressive black-out music played by aged rock dinosaurs rising from some Celtic swirl of doom and gloom. The new age of metal dawned in Los Angeles under harsh sun. It's been simmering there since the early eighties when bands like Motley Crue started slithering around in the cracks between punk and rock. A bit later boys like Axl Rose arrived in town from Hicksville USA, having nurtured their musical sensibilities on a wicked combination of gospel choir singing and Kiss (an oft cited inspiration for the glamorous new rockers).

It's been written that the new age of metal dates back to 1983 and the mega-success of Def Leppard's *Pyromania*. Seven million units later, rival record companies were wondering how the hell they could duplicate the phenomena. How come this macho, blue collar male music was making it on the mainstream airwaves, appealing to girls as much as boys and establishing itself as the hottest vibe in the market?

Lavish production values help and the glimpse of a softer underbelly to the hardrocking stance. New metal acts that have made the charts in the USA did so on the strength of a ballad (Skid Row's '18 and Life', Winger's 'Headed For A Heartache') while all the best hard rock albums feature at least one deeply moving song (Motley Crue's 'Without You', Axl Rose waxing lyrical on 'Sweet Child of Mine', Def Leppard pleading for 'Love and Affection'). The black American acts have got Soul, but nobody can croon about their lonely heart as fetchingly as a white American metalter.

And then there's the matter of image and a swoon-worthy lead singer. As any good girl with a weakness for bad boys in black leather trousers can tell you, there are few sights more moving than that of a long haired youth with cheekbones to die for singing his lungs out about love lost and loneliness endured. The female fans' first impulse is to save him. Failing

that, she buys the record.

Skid Row's Sebastian Bach and Guns n' Roses' Axl Rose lead the pack when it comes to mad, bad, beautiful lead singers. But what all the bands in the new wave of metal share, the boy wonders and the old lags back from the dead (literally in Nikki Sixx of Motley Crue's case: 'Kickstart My Heart' is about the attentions of a paramedic, not a paramour) is an attitude that captures the true spirit of rock and roll. Which is equal parts juvenile delinquency, abject longing, and naked lust. New Metal appeals directly to the disaffected eighteen year old in all of us. It's energising. It's not destructive, suicidal or nasty (the thought for the day on the last page of US heavy metal mag *Circus* reads: "Remember, the superior person shows his character by lifting others, not putting them down"). But it does encourage the urge to party to the max.

Of course boys just wanna have fun. But the best metal acts hit a passionate, romantic nerve buried deep under all the excess. They can swing from a mood of wild abandon to a depth-charged acoustic ballad in the space of a fret change.

Quite frankly, at the end of a decade characterised by yuppie greed and hypocrisy, neo-conservatism and social selfishness, American sleaze rock hits you like a blazing tonic. Especially now that we've exchanged the Me decade for the Meek decade. In the caring, sharing, environmentally conscious nineties, long haired metallers hell bent on having a good time offer a bracing alternative to the self-consciously intelligent alternative scene.

Things do get a little sexist now and then but at least these men are on their knees bawling that they want WOMEN because women are driving them CRAZY with DESIRE. Which is extremely appealing to a woman turned off by her middle class male peers who, by the time they hit thirty, have lost most of their charm along with their hair and their waistlines.

Okay, I concede that Motley Crue's 'Girls, Girls, Girls' video indulged in an ugly dollop of gratuitous sexism (we got the idea

you liked the strip show, guys, you didn't have to carry the girls out over your shoulders at the end of it) but for really offensive emotional attitude, listen to Bros singing 'I Owe You Nothing'. Give me Motley Crue any day. Even their supposedly offensive lyrics have a good natured air of reckless bravado (seen at its silliest in that football chant for the bedroom 'She Goes Down').

The new metal isn't about macho piggery. It's fun and trashy, a pop version of a B-grade Roger Corman movie where the heaviest thing on anybody's mind is a hangover. The emotion is melodramatic, the menace is cartoon and if the men's intentions are less than honourable sometimes, well, at least they're being up front about it. Scratch the surface of your average, achingly sensitive 'alternative band' member and you'll find a libido that beats as strongly for Kylie or Madonna as the next man's.

Anyway, just how macho can a man be when he's wearing more hairspray and jewellery than you are? Squeezed into tight leather trousers, shirts unbuttoned to the naval, hair down to here, today's heavy metal men are tease artists whose every move is calculated to turn women on. Music to a liberated woman's ears indeed.

New Zealand's Metal Scene

There has always been a metal audience in New Zealand. Mind numbing guitar, overblown emotion and lurid lyrics strike a deep chord with a mass of New Zealanders. Heavy metal in New Zealand traditionally goes with posters of tigers leaping through flames on the living room wall, horoscopes and joints on the back porch and women in long muslin skirts who go out with men who refer to them as their 'lady', consider a dog their best friend and a car their salvation.

In other words, the authentic sound of West Auckland. The boys in black jerseys and girls in camisole tops go to the Powerstation to hear bands like Confessor and Saigon Rose (who play their guitars like machine guns). But enjoying popularity at the other end of the metal scale is a bunch of North Shore rock bands who also play at the Powerstation and attract a more glamorous crowd. Bands like



Shihad (L-R) Jon, Phil, Tom, Hamish.

Whiskey and Lace, Push Push, Nine Livez and Circus attract a specifically female contingent who turn up wearing a good imitation of international rock star's girlfriend chic (as glimpsed on *Shakedown* videos): all backless bathing suit dresses and billowing hair. Not that the dress code is sexist — many of the men look just as ravishing in their long hair, skull buckle belts and cowboy boots.

PUSH PUSH

The sun shines on those who come from the North Shore, as Push Push have proved by scoring the support slot for Alice Cooper and Skid Row. *Rip It Up* spoke to rhythm guitarist Silver and singer Mikey in a K Road wind bar one hot winter afternoon. Silver was wearing his American flag singlet and purple tie-dyed jeans, his long brown hair curling around the silver amulets around his neck and partly concealing the rose tattoo on his right bicep (which he got after hearing Guns n' Roses for the first time). Mikey is a fresh faced, bright eyed blonde. All the band hail from



Anigma (L-R) Dave Goodson, Pete Ouzo, Mark Mescal, Si Nickels.

the North Shore. The core band members met at primary school and have been playing together since they were fourteen. How's that for paying your dues?

Despite the fact that they started out "full-on glam" in tights and make-up, Push Push no longer see themselves as a metal or glam rock band. More LA inspired hard rock. All five band members are nineteen or twenty, but they are applying themselves to their cause with a dedication that eludes seasoned pros. Over the Tasman is the obvious next place to go but Los Angeles is the dream destination (with songs like 'Blonde On and On' their audience there would seem



Push Push (L-R) Silver, Mickey Havoc, Scott Cortez, Andy Kane and Steve Abplanalp.

assured).

But Push Push are not just a blonde bimbo's band. Alongside shrilly delivered speedster songs like 'Cherry-O' and 'Diamond Clawed Pussycat' they sing about power tripping corporate jerks ('Beating Up Bullfrogs') and do the odd crazily cranked up cover version (their version of the Knack's 'My Sharona' is blood stirring). It would be nice to hear some slow ballads in their set but on the other hand, when you're great looking, nineteen, healthy,

their girlfriend's hair. Worth watching for.

SHIHAD

Are from Wellington, painfully young and extremely proficient. They started playing at school, recorded a demo, left school and got day jobs but they already have their sights set on making a living from playing. Speed metallers? "No, that's too restrictive a term," says drummer Tom, "it's all a form of metal and it's all powerful so power metal is more accurate. We don't stick to easy tempos but we're not just thrashing out." Tom's listening material includes rap and jazz as well as metal acts from Motley to Slayer. "Music with power and a bit of funk. I don't like listening to rubbish."

Last year Shihad won the Grunt Records Heavy Metal award down South. This year they've recorded their debut LP and are about to undertake their first tour. Not bad for a band whose age range goes from seventeen to nineteen (and they don't even have an identifiable image: long hair and black T-shirts are about as far as it goes). Tom says that the metal scene in Wellington is non-existent. "It's us and Strikemaster, that's it. A lot of bands from secondary school are coming up from the Hutt and Paraparaumu but they haven't hit the pubs yet." DONNA YUZWALK

ANIGMA

Local metal bands fare badly in a scene where 'alternative' means dour students playing what is little more than beefed up folk music. Yet local metal bands are managing to prosper. They have to do it themselves, from finding gigs to producing and promoting their own recordings. Anigma have been gigging regularly and *World of Fear*, their six song cassette, has sold well not only here but in Australia, Europe, the States and even South America! Pete, Si, Dave and Mark got talking in the pub.

The press seem to take the easy way out and compare you to Metallica?

"Yeah, that's really annoying. Most people don't know or like any speed metal except for Metallica so that's all they have to compare us with."

"Even Campus Radio have given us a hard time, not playing our stuff even though it was Number One in the Alternative Top 10."

"Basically the local press is pretty uncomprehending of NZ metal. They

WHISKEY AND LACE

Whiskey and Lace have been off the scene for months due to personnel changes. But now that they've completed their diminished line up with the ex-Psychodaisies rhythm guitarist and a new drummer, lead singer Kelly H says they're ready to roll again. Kelly says they are definitely not a metal band. They're a little deeper and tinged with alternative influences, just as likely to be listening to Jane's Addiction as Aerosmith. As for the North Shore connection, Kelly mentions that he went to Northcote College not Rangitoto, and that he now lives in Devonport, not the Boys. He resists categorisation in general, saying he listens to "anything he doesn't hear a hundred times a day on the radio". Whiskey and Lace aren't bothered about building up an adoring following here nor are their sights set on LA. Kelly would prefer to end up "somewhere more interesting" like New York or Europe. As suggested by the title of their first demo, *Burned Out Paradiseo*, this band is concerned with more meaningful matters than the colour of

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off the track FESTIVAL RECORDS