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PRINCE AND THE NEW POWER GENERATION
Sydney Entertainment Centre, April 30. Setting the mood prior to the concert, across the P.A., the taped voice of Ingrid Chavez reading the slides projected on the venue screens. Subtle messages such as — DONT BUY THE BLACK ALBUM / COME FROM MEMORY / IF YOU'RE SO BRAVE KISS YOUR ENEMY / PRINCE'S FAVOURITE FOOD IS STEWARDESSES / WE TOLD YOU NOT TO COME, TO THE CONCERT / WENDY & LISA PLEASE PHONE HOME.

Then Prince's new video screened, the band took the stage and the lighting rig took over, shimmering / a sexual symbol tilting like a rocket in space, deafening sound-effects, lights shooting like jet propulsion. A 3-D, yet near cinematic contrivance, live above one's head. My vote for this decade's BEST PERFORMANCE BY A LIGHTING RIG!

Somehow Prince emerged in the din and we realised we were in for some loud, heavy funk, an 18 performer circus style indulgence, massive NPG grooves (and moves), the audio experience given an edge by thousands of Prince-size girls screaming through one's ears.

First surprise: In concert Prince shatters the aloof / reclusive image — he was more than just "professionally" personable, on first name terms, he must have said "Sydney" 20 times during the show and midway through Prince exhorted the assembled mob, "SAY PRAYERS FOR L.A." and as the funk groove accelerated he added "IS THERE RACISM IN THE HOUSE TONIGHT!?" He knew what the issue was in L.A! Maybe Prince will extend himself beyond the politics of sex and dance.

Second surprise: Prince is not just a prolific songwriting genius, ace guitarist, bandleader, arranger — he seriously has to get out there and strut his stuff, dance, shake his butt, command the stage, competing with the burlesque of the femme fatale dancers Diamond and Pearl. A genius *having to stick his butt in the face of a large audience is wierd but true, undignified perhaps, but real.*

Four songs into the show Prince visited his first certified oldie 'Let's Go Crazy', bringing even the aged to their feet, soon there after 'Kiss' followed and the ever moving Prince spoke — "SYDNEY, I THINK I WANNA DANCE" — Woo Woooo — he did dance. Phheew! Clever little bastard. Then he disappeared for a pit-stop, while we got a face full of rap funk from the NPG Posse.

Then Prince returned (wearing white), armed with guitar, to astound all with a powerful 'Purple Rain'. It was a relief for the visual focus to fall clearly on Prince for one song. Prince's politics

got personal / insular again: "THERE'S A PILE OF SHIT GOING DOWN IN L.A. BECAUSE WE DON'T CARE ABOUT EACH OTHER ANYMORE." (Maybe he won't make a political recording.)

Prince then left oldie territory behind, except 'Thieves in the Temple' as he powered through songs from *Diamonds And Pearls*, delivered with a gospel-fing'd funk fervour. Vocalist Rosie Gaines assumed a greater role as the show progressed, stomping her way to centrestage on several songs.

Encores: Predictable faves 'Cream' and '1999' (the aged jump to attention) but Rosie Gaines singing lead on 'Car Wash' with Prince on rhythm guitar was another surprise!

Then a final funk jam and the lighting rig takes over. The jet propelled rocket travels into space, a mega-noise soundtrack to top off a loud night with Prince, his Power Generation and his props. He was triumphant without using many of his classic songs. Prince didn't play most of my faves and it didn't bloody matter.

MURRAY CAMMICK

STRAITJACKET FITS S.P.U.D., KING LOSER Gluepot, April 18.

King Loser are Chris Heazlewood of Olla / Sferic Experiment, ex-Axelgrinder / cabaret star Celia Pavlova and Duane Zarakov, the world's only relevant Pink Floyd fan. So are they the combined South Island jihad that'll rid Auckland of its joke-funkers and sub-Seattle trad rockers, or just another celebrity gameshow? Well no-one else I've spoken to has admitted to liking them so far, but I don't see why they shouldn't be something like the former. It's impossible to underestimate the value of a great name for a start and they've certainly got that. But wait, there's more. They're already being tagged "surf music" on the strength of one and a half songs, but that ignores Heazlewood's blisteringly ironic monologues and the way his guitar turns from lithe sex machine into terrorist weapon in the blink of an ear, not to mention the sullenest bass, spine chillingest backing vocals and most wildly, well, Zarakovich drums in Christendom. All this and the kind of dress sense teenage bands can only dream about.

And so to the SPUD review, in which any remaining shred of "objectivity" is gleefully obliterated. Am I supposed to be biased in their favour because they used, out of misplaced charity, to play my songs, or against them because they kicked me out? Who cares! They're still great because they make the listener deal with noise for its own sake, not as a supercharging of standard rock libido, nor as the resistance that sweetens the eventual discovery of a kernel of melody, but as pure, beautiful electric power. The addition of a French horn was an inspired move too; is the pervert's nostalgia that once drove them to cover 'Feel Like Making Love' going to lead to the invention of fusioncore?

If Straitjacket Fits are about to

become multinational rock stars (yeah, just like the Chills) the choice of support bands (and of the Young Gods as incidental music) reads like the kind of intent statement that makes you want to buy them a large drink and *not* ask them what maniac kidnapped them in England and gave them matching bowl-bob haircuts. Their set tonight is further proof that if anyone deserves the corporate position, they do — they sound just like you know they do only more so: corrosive, poppy and ethereal all at once in a way no-one else can manage and yes, the removal of Mr Brough has purged them of that lingering taste of Everly Brothers.

And yet for some reason it was impossible to get excited. "Quite good" has rightly become a term of the utmost critical damnation, but on occasions like this its literal meaning almost deserves rehabilitation. But I suspect the real problem has nothing to do with the band themselves. I know there'll be indignant letters about this from Pakuranga, but it's very difficult to love a band when the First XV of Auckland Grammar are stage diving to them. Every song was given a virtual ticker-tape welcome by a crowd who grimaced resolutely through SPUD and King Loser, the kind of people who think Kurt Cobain invented distortion, who probably think Julian Clary must be only pretending to be, y'know, a fag. Perfect targets for Shayne Carter's legendary bile, if only he would use it.

BOB DYLAN Mt Smart Supertop, April 18.

Bob Dylan. Why bother? Just another ageing rock 'n' roll dinosaur who just can't stop rolling (some dreadful form of arthritis known only to old rock musicians). Consider more astonishingly that Bob Dylan has been on the road, virtually continuously, for two years (dubbed the never-ending tour), playing the material the nostalgic generation crave ("How many times must a man..."). Why not rest on his more than considerable laurels and coffers and watch the industry go through its own mutations?

The answer was evident during an inspired performance at the Big Top in April. Sure, they can't all be like this, the unevenness of the evening's proceedings bore witness to the fact that Dylan only plays well when he's in the mood. He seems to care little about pleasing fans and critics, countless bad contractual-bound albums ('Wiggle Waggle' anyone?) with an outstanding piece like 'Oh Mercy' in the middle, demonstrates this glaring inconsistency.

The fact is Dylan plays for Dylan and when he played well you could see the light suddenly flicker up in his face. Old Man Moses turns into Springsteen. Dylan live is quite capable of a lack-lustre going-through-the-motions. He did it a few years back with Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers resting on the power of the band. This was evident here as he launched into cabaret-style versions of tracks like 'Rainy Day Women' and 'Just Like A Woman' (Goddam awful with a full

blazing 'rock' backing band). The magic slowly turned up in the solo acoustic spots and when Dylan started picking up the energy of the band. Situated in a big top, there were all the expectations of a travelling circus. Dylan certainly looked like a ringleader. The seating provisions were crazy, as soon as the band launched into the first number, the young rushed to the front in as dignified manner as possible and everyone had to stand. Dylan's band, to be expected, were exceptional, if occasionally a little workmanlike. Style and colour from the Clapton-looking guitarist through to the welcome heavy dose of slide guitar from the chap in the 10-gallon hat.

Dylan began the evening with plenty of silence and frowns, virtually ignoring anything that moved. By the middle of the set, obviously pleased with himself, he started to play up to the occasion, blabbering incomprehensively at the audience at a drop of his hat and even telling the odd bad joke. The performance also picked up. The broad range of material chosen ranged from the obvious and a few current gems ('Shooting Star') through to difficult material that took a little courage and was not always entirely successful ('Desolation Row', 'Visions of Johanna'). What really impressed was the new life given to some old overly familiar material. I never thought I could ever listen to 'Blowin' In The Wind' or 'Times They Are A' Changin'' without cringing again, but Dylan knocked them off with the sweetest of voices and beautiful new melodies. Meanwhile, 'Highway 61 Revisited' and 'All Along The Watchtower' rocked out with the inspiration of Hendrix.

Just another working night for the band and sure, he still plays harmonics like a kid picking one up for the first time, but at 50 Dylan, with the mood taking him, was an unexpected thrill.

MARK AMERY

SUPERGROOVE ROUGH OPINION LEADERS OF STYLE The Box, April 14.

These funky shows are now getting to be as regular and as big as the rock 'n' roll ones and that certainly can't hurt. Least of all tonight, with LOS kicking things off in an uptempo sort of way. These boys have the whole rap stage show thing wired. They do raps that have an edge but are still pretty accessible and have the ability to get a crowd really moving. There's all the usual chant-along bits, the DJ gets to show off and there's even moments where the more vigorous front man flails around in the crowd. It's good sounds and good fun which is what it's all about.

Next up were Rough Opinion, who are favourites around here and they further cemented their reputation tonight. A year ago they were bringing their wall of noise rap to an enthusiastic crowd of about 20. Tonight there was a club full of enthusiastic people and Rough Opinion were still

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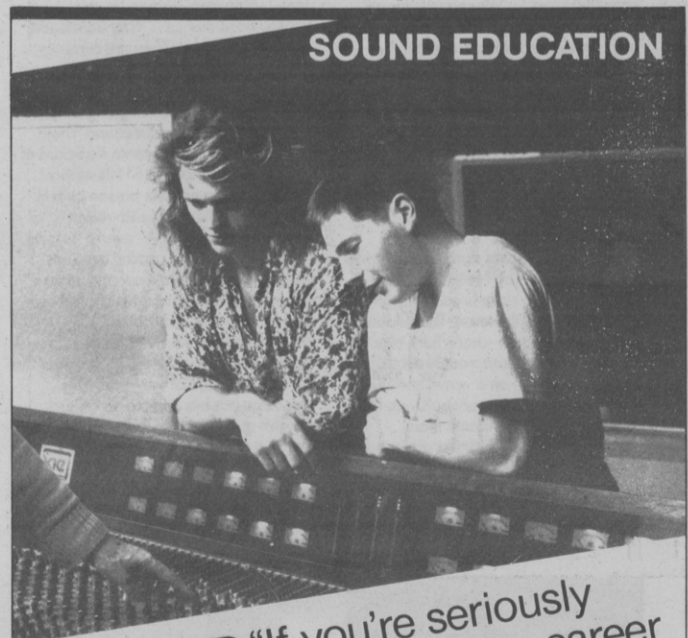
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