

LIVE REVIEWS

RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS HEAD LIKE A HOLE Supertop, October 29.

The scene: you're standing on concrete for hours in a cold circus tent with 12,000 people trampling your toes and jamming their elbows in your ribs. The bands you have come to see are tiny dots bouncing around on stage a quarter of a mile away.

Head Like A Hole did their thing first — the rock equivalent of someone mowing the lawn really fast, a rush of aural Lucozade. Taken to pieces and examined part by part, the songs and the musicianship are not special, but such is the visual/decibal/energy onslaught (and the standard of pap this band are competing against internationally, tonight's headline act excepted) the punters came away convinced they had witnessed rock music as its most elemental and extreme.

Then (after a long break during which a fat MC failed to entertain us) the Chili Peppers unfurled their techni-coloured, pan-rhythmic musical magic carpet, tho' it was hard to hang on for the ride with people bumping into you and blocking your view and your back hurting from straining to see the stage between the tent poles. But far from being a pumpin', "full-on", "funk-thrash" band that "blows you away", the Chili Peppers proved themselves a much more elegant species, intense, displaying finely tuned dynamic range and bringing more subtlety to bear on their songs live than on record — no mean feat in a venue this intimate. They mixed up old songs and new, new guitarist Arik Marshall adding virtuoso (tho kind of cold) lead breaks. Covers included 'Cross Town Traffic' and a Black Flag song. Then Flea stood still under the spotlight and, in a soft falsetto, sang the verses to Neil Young's 'Needle And The Damage Done' — a spellbinding tribute to Hilal Slovak, the original Chili guitarist who died of a heroin overdose some years ago.

The capacity crowd was vast and appreciative (and very young) and it made you think, for once the masses have chosen well. This band loves music, sings and plays bravely and they've got something to say ('Party On Your Pussy?') But next time I don't want to have to stand in a cattle-pen to see them.

DONNA YUZWALK

ROCKMELONS MOANA & THE MOAHUNTERS, NGAIRE.

Town Hall, October 24.

Anyone who made it to the Town Hall early this

Saturday night would have been well rewarded. Ngaire, local soul heroine, warmed the audience and held some spellbound. The second time I've seen Ngaire and the demure girl from DTM's has blossomed into a vibrant, assured singer and performer. The strident 'Attitude' and ebullient 'So Divine' a crystal reflection of her ability. Fair's fair however, D-Faction, masquerading as backing band in an arranged marriage I suspect made by the Southside starmaking machine, gave this performance more edge than a Stanley knife. Simon Lynch's keyboards laced with Tony T's guitar showed D-Faction as a bright light on Auckland's burgeoning soul horizon — mixed with Ngaire, our own boogie wonderland. Not all was funk and charm, a tinge of sadness too, when 'Miss U' was dedicated to bassist Kenny Pearson.

Now, my ever-expanding waistline kicked and I missed Moana and the Moa Hunters. What can I say?

Core members of the Rockmelons Ray Medhurst, keyboards, and brothers Bryan and Jonathon Jones, keyboards and guitar respectively have been around since the early 80s. Playing around their Australian homeland and releasing material in hope of chart response. The album *Form One Planet* has been the one that cracked the wider market and spawned a few successful singles. Both live and on the album a number of ring-ins were summoned. A rhythm section whose names managed to elude me during the "let's hear it for the drummer" stuff. Ex-pat Stuart Pierce, a bit of a whizz: ten fingered keyboard player. Vocal duties were split three ways. MC for the evening, one Eric Sebastian. Doug Williams carried the male harmony and crooned a few slower numbers. "Main man" and dynamic

of the trio was Deni Hines. Quite an impressive line-up. What did they do? Where did they go wrong?

The Rockmelons had just over an hour's worth of catchy sorta toons, mostly their own and a credible cover of Bill Withers' 'Ain't No Sunshine'. The sound was full, besides the aforementioned band, plenty of sampled strings, brass, bits and bytes. The vocals were mixed and matched, Deni Hines' Ruby Turner vibrato to Doug Williams' soulmeister seductive warble that in the right setting could have the underwear flying. These parts made a professional show, full of good, clean fun. The audience certainly lapped it up.

But — and make that a big but — nothing shone, the energy was forced. Pop soul by numbers that never shifted from mid-tempo mush. That word d.u.l.l. A mad toddler with a feather pillow would have made more impact. Some bands go for smoke machines. The Rockmelons would have gone down well with soap bubbles: pretty, shiny, innocuous. However, in the end all that's left is damp and shiny patches.

BARBIE

THE CLOUDS ABLE TASMANS, NIXONS

Powerstation, October 13

Hang my head in shame for missing all but the last song of the Nixon's set. Between band reactions from a few friendly punters ranged from delirious to "we sucked" from drummer Mark. Guess they must have been somewhere in between.

Back on the drum stool for the Able Tasman after the briefest of sojourns with the Chills was Craig Mason. And a great job he did in propelling the band through a rousing though slightly soft centred set. Vocalist Peter Kean has one of the sweetest

voices this side of the Tropic of Capricorn and all the stage presence of a totem pole. But it's their lack of rock-star posturing and macho swagger that gives the Able Tasman much of their unpretentious charm. Founder member Graeme Humphries continues to behave like a maniacal jumping jack when the occasion takes him. On this night it was during a demented cocktail jazz piano solo in an awesome rendition of 'Hold Me 1'. When everything clicks for the Able Tasman you can't help but end up with a cheesy grin from ear to ear.

I could say the Clouds blew into the Powerstation and played up a storm but I'd choke on my own cliché. The sentiment's about right though. When the superbly crafted twisted guitar pop of songs such as 'Soul Eater', 'Fear The Moon', 'Misery' and the encore 'Hieronymus' are played this well, the results are hugely impressive. To top it off, the harmonies of Jodi Phillis and ex-pat Aucklander Patricia Young were straight from a celestial choir — narry a bum note to be heard between them.

Apart from one of those technical hitches during their first number when Patricia Young's bass refused to co-operate, the Clouds were the personification of professionalism. But just occasionally the songs were a little too tightly reigned in. Oh for that majestic but controlled Clouds hip-sway to turn into a hip-shaking wild-out. Still, it's frightening to think that a band can sound this good one album into a fledgling career.

MARTIN BELL

AXEL GRINDERS, SCUZZBUCKETS DUNG PUNCTURE, RAINY DAYS Boardwalk Bar, October 25.

"Pluralism requires mainstream and periphery as distinctly separate domains despite whatever objects any given creator, spokesman, audience or entrepreneur might place within the dichotomy" — R. Meltzer (under the name of one armed poet Blaise Cendrars) 1972.

Damn straight! In a time of dismal consensus it's necessary to start putting the barriers back up, to be intolerant (not to mention intolerable wherever possible), to insist on extremity of any kind as an act of WAR. Because there is a general consensus, a mainstream of "alternative" rock fans and they all flock to see longhair mediocrities like . . . well you KNOW who I'm talking about, then they stay away en masse from a sublime freakshow like tonight's. Don't be led astray, these people are still the ENEMY.

Anyway, the first revolutionaries and/or perverts on display tonight were Rainy Days, three hairy pieces of Gestalt, minus the prog-wash of the recordings, but with the rhythm section really cutting loose, burying the beat under chemically imbalanced jazz abstractions. It sounded more or less like nothing else on earth, or at least nothing I've ever seen at the Boardwalk Bar.

Next attraction: Dung Puncture, Frisbeecorp International's most successfully stomach



Mike Nixon

turning enterprise yet. They started innocently enough, robbing the graves of Abba and the mighty Human League, but then they entered the realm of true Evil with reverentially correct versions of 'Islands In The Stream' and (brace yourself) 'Brown Girl In The Ring'. I just hope the fact that they also played 'Material Girl' isn't a coded threat of a Frisbee nude photo book.

The Scuzzbuckets are mind blowing when your face is about two inches away from the PA speaker. The bass stalks, the guitar stabs, the singer might not be "serious" but he looks like he's ready to kill (he almost did the previous night at the Punch and Judy club when some dumb fuck tried to steal his drink). Their noise is totally primitive and perfectly formed. It almost hurts. If you move back and stand with the cool people at the bar and stop concentrating the Scuzzbuckets could almost be mistaken for one of the Psychosmakfatelvis bands you end up seeing every weekend in Auckland, but I guess that's just the small price of social mobility.

And if the Scuzzbuckets almost hurt the Axel Grinders let it bleed. This was the third time I've seen them and the best but the formula hasn't changed; walk on stage, cleanse the (by now almost non-existent) audience's collective mind with a half-minute blast of pure noise, then rock like a four-headed beast from another planet (i.e. be yourself) for forty minutes, pausing only to tell bad jokes/true stories about the Sticky Filth on Zarakov's trousers. They take every rock move (musical or physical) seen since the dawn of time miles further than their teenage rivals ever dare to, and in doing so somehow become not more but less ridiculous or self-parodic than any other band in the universe. But whatever it is that really sets them apart also makes criticism redundant; it's beyond explanation, an Apparatus of Love. Yeah, the Axel Grinders are unspeakable.

MATTHEW HYLAND

COSMIC PSYCHOS, ANONYMOUS GURU, CULTURE STONE Gluepot, November 5

Two support bands and I only managed to miss one of 'em, bummer. Culture Stone were the "lucky" ones and I still can't think of anything much to say about em . . . sat up the back talking to Z-Bob whilst inwardly debating what's-the-ethical-thing-to-do-here, the following conversation ensues: me — "Hey Z-Bob, what can I say about these guys?" Z-Bob — "Say they were crap." OK — they were crap (Easy, no?) ('slong as they don't hunt me down and kill me). So alright — the Cosmic Psychos. They're Australian, they're loud (name something Australian that isn't) (a

wombat?) and sorta like Motorhead, Blue Cheer, Killozer — comparisons these palookas ACTUALLY DESERVE — they're pretty much a bass-player's band . . . Bassman in q. is grizzled 30-something looks-like-a-truck-driver type bloke known as Knighty and he and his four fat strings drag the whole shebang along on a burly sledge of mung. Not to say the other two don't shovel their share of the poop — the drummer, a big bald mofo who also sings — let's hear it for bald drummers! — and sensitive application of wah-wah overkill from the sensitive guitarist, make for a pungent home-brew. I already mentioned Motorhead so, uh, so I'll do it again . . . and what about the encore performance of 'Elle', tribute I guess to, I dunno, is she the one who married Joe Cocker . . . anyway, anyway, Mr Knighty walks back on, bassless, brew in one hand and cigarette in other, and improvises several minutes of sheer Tony Bennett suaveness. Pretty suave!

DUANE ZARAKOV

SUPERCAR, SHAFT

Punch and Judy, October 30th
SHAFT . . . you already know. Or you don't . . . either way, who needs ya . . . get outta my way . . . I'm here to tell you about SUPERCAR. It was Friday night, the stinking butt-end of downtown Auckland (Fort St), I was pooting around on a fucked-up bicycle w/ two flat tyres, I was tripping on acid, blah blah blah, get a life etc . . . you get the picture I'm sure . . . a fucking dismal scene that even Shaft could do little to dispel and these five drunks make the stage, briefly taunt the audience for having paid \$2 apiece to get in (the singer throws a \$2 coin into their midst) and thence all is blurch-and-squark action of the most celestial-entropic nature since, don't know, can't remember. Within about a minute of each song's beginning everything appears to have been destroyed . . . but it hasn't, they just get to the bottom and go back to the top of the slide, again and again and again. Which is eventually how they blow it, cos (if you're still sober) you recognise before too long that everything has degenerated into predictable theatre of telegraphed gesture — which only makes it better as perfectly-encapsulated microcosm of the macrocosm (of rock n'roll, and of everything else too) but also makes me feel like I don't have to stick around 'til the end and might as well get back out there into the predictable theatre of the real world. And s'far as actually being in a band like this, it's cool for at least a while but if anyone cares, actual musical expression is being thwarted . . . maybe unless they get a saxophone player or two in there.

DUANE ZARAKOV