

Live

The Go-Betweens Chills, Able Tasmans The Gluepot, Feb 16

This weekend was originally to be the last before the Gluepot went into a six month dry dock for major alterations. The deadline was put back a week to allow a "special" goodbye weekend. I got no sense of history perhaps but a gig like this would have been a considerably more encouraging way to lower the curtain on this bar than another All-Stars trot-out. I mean, this was exciting!

Able Tasmans seemed to be playing almost every weekend for a while last year. Almost always a support band, they had an unfortunate sense of being a novelty act — TV themes, popular covers, crazee keyboard playing. And, of course, the novelty began to wear off ... But back now with their own soundman and lots of new songs, Able Tasmans are no longer a novelty act. There's a darker side to the music now, and a lot more thought as regards arrangement. The major problem to be wrestled with now is the sameness of texture embodied in the keyboards/bass/drums lineup. The homogenous sound all but obscured the considerable variety in the songs themselves. The obvious solution would be to add

another member — but then they wouldn't want to lose that sparseness, would they? Hmmmm. Still, the best moments (like 'New Sheriff' and 'Funny Man') were triffic.

No doubt more than a few people were lured along to the Gluepot by the promise of the Chills playing. And the Chills did not disappoint. It should be said here that the Chills *did not play a single bad song*. In fact, keeping track of personal favourites can be quite a daunting task given the rapid-fire string of good 'uns and great 'uns that make up a Chills set.

The difference with the Chills at present is that the playing is doing justice to the songs. The four on stage play very much as a band, hitting time changes (which there seem to be a lot of these days) and the like ideally and naturally. The core of it is Terry Moore's bass playing — the notes coil and twine intelligently around the bottom of the songs. There's the impression that everyone is playing full-tilt — which *doesn't* necessarily mean playing fast.

Martin Philipps remains the visual focus and he's a joy to watch. The friendly, slightly nervous figure who speaks between songs is the next minute the wide-eyed electric figure spitting out the words to 'Smile From A Dead, Dead Face' like he's speaking in tongues. His singing continues to improve — the low, low from-the-diaphragm notes that trail away

the chorus to 'Night Of Chill Blue' are genuinely affecting.

Of course the (60s) punk maelstrom this band can whip up is only one side to the Chills — certain nuances get lost in a crowded pub. More and more recording will round out the Chills as something that is pretty rare now — a great rock 'n' roll band.

The previous night some people said the Chills were a better band than the main act, the Go-Betweens. But as Andrew Boak said, they were a *different* band — trying to compare the two was simply dumb.

Music like that played live by the Go-Betweens *can* run the risk of being merely disciplined and intelligent (or even, God forbid, "bookish"), but the performance (particularly this night) makes it a lot more than that. Certainly the music does demand some attention but if you've paid 10 bucks to ignore the band you're a wanker.

The Go-Betweens' onstage volume is relatively low and it was possible, if you listened, to pick out every component of a song — including the words. Grant McLennan and Robert Forster bounced off each other with guitars and — as in the sublime 'Five Words' — with vocals. Between them Robert Vickers' bass carries the songs along. Lindy Morrison is a classic non-rock 'n' roll drummer in the Mo Tucker mould — she plays like she was an artist or something who decided she wanted to play drums; and did, her way. It's a taut,

snapping style — no biff-plonk here.

Most of the audience seemed to be familiar with only a handful of the songs, which was understandable. As a result, 'Cattle and Cane' and 'Bachelor Kisses' got the biggest reactions — along with the more immediate songs like the wry 'Draining the Cool'. Other songs to come across well live were Forster's quirky 'On My Block' and McLennan's 'King Of Mirrors', dedicated to Nick Cave ('Nicotine-stained angels sing in his defence ... But the saddest thing of all is, he's just a King of Mirrors ...').

Something which seemed to bypass many in the crowd was the fat vein of humour that ran through the whole set: 'I'm a great singer and a very good guitarist and this is a wonderful song that I wrote,' said Forster, deadpan, and the crowd seemed to take him at his word, uttering barely a murmur. Forster was a weird figure — his lanky build seemed make the stage unbalanced — he squirmed and frowned and then would break into a narcissistic, hip-swirling dance, eyes closed in apparent ecstasy.

Forster even descended to the dancefloor to swivel his bum among the punters (who stood and stared) at one point. Much of the activity seemed to be an attempt to stir up some audience reaction and the band apparently almost did not do an encore because of the dull crowd

response.

We should be glad they did — the final song was a magnificently stretched, torn and twisted 'River Of Money'. A perfect way to end. As Brian Eno once said, only 20,000 people might have bought the first Velvet Underground album, but sooner or later they all went out and formed bands ...

Okay, so who played in the rest of the world this weekend?

Russell Brown

The Spines, Ten Foot Faces Clyde Quay Tavern, Jan 25

This was the first time I'd seen the Spines. In Wellington the name has an aura of independent originality and something exciting in an avant-garde way. My illusions were shattered. They were just another lightweight funk band, and fairly boring with it.

The music itself was played very well. Sound was dominated by the bass, which formed a steady funky (God, I hate that word) beat with some light, sensitive drumming. This provided the stage for Jon McLeary's guitar punctuation. He also sang what seemed to be original songs, but I couldn't hear a word he sang. By the time the words got beyond the mike, they were just another ambiguous, chewed-up noise.

So, Jon, I hope you do something about it. After all, some of us really want to hear what you've got to say. A twittering sax was added in the second set, which seems to be the latest thing

to do. Stage atmosphere was fairly quiet. It was lit by a single, minimalist red light.

The Spines were preceded by a four-piece called Ten Foot Faces. They were very good. Tight, dry and sometimes innovative, they were in the mould of Magazine. In fact, they sounded exactly like Magazine, with a Devoto sound-alike on vocals. Like the Spines, though, they were too serious and lacked that vital element involved in putting on a lively show.

So what else was on in Wellington? Heavy metal foursome Madlight bashing away largely covers to a sedate crowd of denim brains at the terminus. New band with innocuous name Crook Straight at the Cricketers. Fairly light sound, mainly doing covers — like a pre-Siouxie 'Prudence'. And talented, experienced cover band Fool Proof at the Clarendon, churning out their versions of 'Miss You', 'Black Night', 'Start Me Up', etc, etc.

But it was a beautiful weekend in the Capital. At the end of each show, the few punters left in the pubs drank up and disappeared into the night mulling something about parties, night clubs, Ghostbusters and how to avoid Neil Young when he arrives.

Clifton Fuller

Crying Out Loud, the Glass, the Tradaviks

Clyde Quay Tavern, Feb 2.

The Clyde Quay Tavern (aka The

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