

Live

Festival of Wimin Performers

Electric Ballroom, Wellington
August 22, 23, 24

Aargh! Your "rock" critic gets her shit together to finally tell you about the Festival of Wimin Performers. Hard, hard, *hard* to tell you about three days of, well, joy at seeing, hearing and experiencing women performers from Aotearoa. Women organised the festival, ran it, supported it, and performed it. What I'm trying to make you see is that *this* was no ordinary event, but on the other hand, it was completely natural.

The first night, Friday, was more "up" than the two following nights. Things definitely got more low-key as the festival progressed, but no less interesting or important. Ann Jones, poet, kicked things off with rapid-fire dialogue and quick costume changes. Funny and suggestive, she was a warm beginning. Martha and Anne Samasoni and Asia Sola looked a little nervous, but really had no reason to be, they were wonderful. It was the first of two times we were to hear the almost anthemic 'Because We Are Woman'. The first of many perfect moments where it seems your heart may burst, where it seems your senses are totally focussed into that one moment.

Unfortunately I couldn't see everything, and Out of the Compost and Indigo Underworld were performances I heard rather than saw. What I did hear was wonderful singing and harmonies. OOTC used a variety of acoustic-type instruments (and an ironing board), and I am reliably informed you could fall in love with them. I've slapped my own wrists, don't worry.

Indigo Underworld use a mixture of electric and acoustic instruments, and make a "soft" kind of impression. I can see them progressing into something quite stunning — and totally original too. If you're talking composure, competence and warmth, you're talking Jan Ballard. She has a beautiful voice, and such songs! Obviously a great storehouse she just reaches back into. Weaving



Jay Clarkson

those woman-foes, I could listen for hours. Putty in Her Hands were definitely worth waiting for. They have such good humour and bright healthiness, you are immediately charmed. Particularly good lyrically, and more lovely singing. A definite feature of the festival was the voices.

Stiltwalkers always freak me out, I was so scared Anezka Novak would bang her head on the rafters. But of course, she didn't. She did a tale of a dancer who gets really fed up with the violinist who keeps making her dance. She knocks the violin player (Andrea Cocks) to the ground, then feels *really* guilty. Imagine the joy when the violinist comes back to life! Viva la violinista! Last up were Dead Famous People. These women don't talk any shit, don't take any shit and you can't fuck with them. Neat, neat, neat, a couple of covers in there (like Mike Nesmith's Joanne), but mostly original, and we didn't want them to stop. In fact we persuaded them to do 'Muscle Arms' twice. A perfect end to a perfect night.

The festival was quite a multimedia event. A number of films were shown over the two days, with several short animated films sticking in my mind, as do Caz Sheldon's videos. Gaylene Preston and a number of other women took the opportunity to video all three nights, and a journalism and a photography student did studies of the festival. Saturday afternoon saw a number of films, with the women who made them on hand

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