



◀ Big Game Hunters ▲ Robin Shingleton, Eklectic Club



Knightshade



Jack Pudding

LIVE

Battle of the Bands Galaxy, November 1

One month and over a hundred bands later, the Battle of the Bands reached its climax in Auckland. Were we about to witness the eight best young bands in New Zealand? Eight

best is arguable, but young, no — the prize package proved tempting to several seasoned but unsigned performers. Pitting professionals (who like everyone else in NZ music have no money) against amateurs has altered the spirit of the competition.

So: Auckland's hardworking Jack Pudding were first up in the final. Very visually aware, with a lead singer like something out of a Ken Russell movie, they're really a lumpen gothic beast with jerky stop-start rhythms. But the lead guitarist weaves some fine lines through the metallic sound, and the drummer's good. They're well practised, but the problem is, little of the music is very appealing or stimulating.

The Laundrettes from Wellington followed with their op-shop funk. A large band, all were dressed in bright gold cutoff dressing gowns, males and females in short skirts and tights. Plenty of humour and originality to their Sly Stone influenced sound, which is very vocal heavy: the lead singer used to front Marching Orders, and has her moments, but not when she's wailing like Kate Bush. Very clever, they might be having fun themselves, but the songs are inaccessible.

Auckland's Skindivers slickly ran through their tight hard rock, all long hair, tight jeans and cliches. But at least they're songs, with good choral singing. However by the third number the grungy rhythm was getting tedious. Skindivers are good at their bag though, but don't offer anything extra to the limited hard rock genre.

Cattlebirds from Wellington started off well with an energetic Creedence-style instrumental. They're energetic and spirited, very Georgia Satellites, and they'd be good fun in a pub. 'What's a Public Bar (Without a Jukebox)?' had a good country

melody, but 'I Shot the Man Who Shot My Pa' ventured into Johnnys thrash territory; unfortunately I sense this is what they're really into.

Christchurch's Eklectic Club had an enigmatic start, with hired horn section the Newton Hoons playing 'God Defend NZ.' A tall dude reminiscent of Mark Williams, dressed in long black coat and bright red epaulettes, started some funky guitar. Then! New Zealand's answer to Prince bounces on, dressed in velvet hipuggers and covered in chains. He leaps and rolls about, using the stage like Terence Trent. But his wonderful voice takes him out of the imitation league; a ballad was particularly impressive, but the dancey 'Forever and a Day' was the best. The Eklectic Club are based around guitarist Tom Van Koeverden and singer Robin Shingleton, who is a real discovery. Behind them were a band of classy musicians — including US funk guitarist Eric Johns, of 'Boogie Nights' fame, now resident in NZ — and have only been together a matter of weeks. With a regular band behind them, particularly a hot funk rhythm section, who fit in visually, they'll be unstoppable.

Knightshade went all out from the moment they hit the stage. Wayne Elliot has a great, friendly, stage personality, and he's backed by a mean bunch of droogs dressed in leather. Tight as, 'The Physical You' is just one of their many good songs, Elliot's a strong singer and the two guitarists know all their licks and tricks. The

Skindivers could take a leaf out of their book at keeping hard rock fresh and exciting — perhaps Knightshade's three EPs on Reaction would be the place to start.

Big Game Hunters from Christchurch bounced on to strobe lighting and funk bass: three pirouetting female vocalists with lion mane hairdos, backed by a large, tight band. The energy never let up and they made an impressive sight. The lead singer is a Dolly Parton minx, in leather mini and tassles. Why so much visual description? They were good as a band, but were playing rubbish — and it all sounded like the same song.

So, Chrome Safari brought up the rear, and they had the best songs of the evening, particularly 'Anything For You,' which is out now on Pagan. The fairest way to look at this Narc-heavy edition of Chrome Safari — the lineup of which was essentially the Kuitze Band, and remember who sponsored the contest — was as a vehicle for Simon Alexander. A man of many talents, composing, singing, and guitar well, many in the country could do worse than aspire to his high standards. But what's missing is stage presence and charisma, and this is entertainment, after all.

The envelope, please: the winners were Eklectic Club, with Knightshade second and Big Game Hunters and Chrome Safari third equal. Consolation prize must go to Dick Driver, still in good humour after 120 bands and one month on the road.

Chris Bourke

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