

Radio Arts Lobster
Christchurch Polytech,
June 13

This dance featured six garage bands (for want of a better word). With the exception of Ballon D'essai, all the bands were appearing for the first time in public.

Twelve-88 were up first, enthusiasts with a repertoire of covers from Velvets through Wire. They set their sights low and succeeded within those narrow frames of reference. A bright, enjoyable start, disappointing only in that if they can reproduce Modern Lovers, Suburban Reptiles, Iggy and the others with such ease then they should be looking further afield.

Drowning Is Easy tried for more and succeeded less. Song titles like 'Pigs Are The Real Criminals', 'Spoons For Christ', 'Antarctic Cover Up' and 'Ego-mania Unlimited' are a clue. Their progress will be interesting, all the more so when they eliminate the messiness.

Ballon D'essai have made magnificent strides since their debut in March. They are possessed of a guitarist, drummer, two bass players and a vocalist that doesn't exactly hate John Lydon. They played two sets,

testimony to an endless flow of original material, and throughout remained cohesive and single-minded. The PiL connection is ever-present but they are always Ballon D'essai.

Mainly Spaniards were the triumph of the evening, Richard James (ex Stanley Wrench, Hard Sums), Nick (ex Lollies) and David Swift were less frantic, more composed than the evening's other participants, but their pop songs won over all but the most rabid. It's too early to be definitive about this band but they won my heart when I was expecting far less.

Exploding Phone Booths made a special point of asking me to be nice to them, but in their self-indulgent, tuneless noise I could find nothing to be even vaguely complimentary about. They were dreadful and should reconsider immediately.

To the Droogs fell the unenviable task of finishing off a too lengthy evening in a rapidly clearing hall. A three piece, they fall somewhere in between Twelve-88 and Mainly Spaniards. Their best moments came when they avoided the temptation to play fewer chords, faster ... George is a vocalist of considerable talent and I look forward to falling over them again soon.

Michael Higgins

Playthings
Gladstone

Goodbyes are always the hardest. The Playthings, seemingly one of the few remaining oases of wit and originality in an ever-shrinking Christchurch band scene, played out their last stand over three nights at the Gladstone. The split is an amicable one, but hard to take none the less.

The Playthings came in contrasts. Nicky and Janine up front with a touch of evil and irresponsibility, seemingly ever on the lookout for that golden opportunity to run completely amok. Jay and David, to the back, anchoring the band with a quieter, more down-to-earth presence. Theirs were metallic pop songs with real live hooks; songs built around a nucleus of Jay's bass, David's drums and Janine's guitar, and embellished by Nicky with flutes, guitars, electric drills and anything else that happened to be lying around at the time.

These days, people are only too willing to declare the possibilities of rock exhausted to the point of imminent death. And yet, as in the beginning, the role of vocals and vocalists is still rigidly structured. As it was twenty years ago, the heads-down no-nonsense lead singer still holds full sway. In those years little has changed. If the Playthings had achieved nothing else, they would still have won my heart for being so willing to confuse and explore the role of vocals. Jay, Nicky and Janine took songs, verses, choruses and lines turn and turnabout. It is our continuing loss that few are so adventurous.

Michael Higgins

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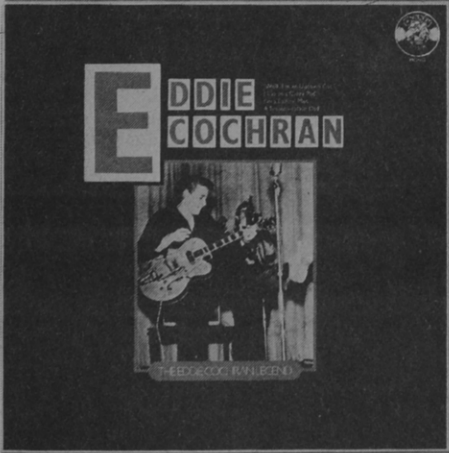
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