

SWEETWATERS

SUNDAY

MILTOWN STOWAWAYS

Ex Newmatics and others heading off into more uptempo funky territory but retaining at this stage perhaps a few too many rough edges for maximum impact. They have a couple of pretty useful vocalists and some interesting material, but of a too urban-nocturnal style to be displayed to best advantage in broad daylight in the middle of a paddock. DM

THE GURLZ

The Gurlz really pulled one out of the bag, the twin vocal attack of Kim Willoughby and Shelley Pratt sweeping aside the rather ugly rape vibe with which a large portion of the audience reacted to the sight of a predominantly female band. If the songs are a little too lightweight, this is redeemed by an educated sense of humour. DM

HERBS

Herbs delivered. Tight, heartfelt and melodic and the audience recognised it. This band just seems to be getting better and better. The enlarged line-up has increased the scope of the music, without changing its spirit. It can only be good that ideas like those in 'French Letter' and 'Crazy Mon' can reach such a large audience. The band sealed its favouritism with the audience with the introduction of three polynesian dancers. Just wait for the album. RB

UB40

First impressions of UB40 were that they had had one smoke too many before taking the stage. The first few songs were sloppy and the band was slow coming together.

"This is an early single of ours and it's called 'I Think It's Going to Rain To ...' - 'ell, we've just done that one!" said Toaster Astro and the crowd laughed knowingly. Things got better from about then and at times the band touched on the brilliant. Not all of the success could be attributed to the musicians, however. When things took a dubwise turn the man at the controls was able to pluck voices, instruments, sounds out of the mix with elegance and precision. The highlight came in the encore when

Herbs joined the band on stage for a stunning, extended 'Madam Medusa' and 'Food for Thought'. The weather may have been cool but UB40 were hot. RB

THE NEIGHBOURS

After the goodwill generated by UB40, the Neighbours had a good crowd to work with. Their kind of soul was suited to the occasion and they turned in their usual tight performance. RB

DANCE EXPONENTS

This band, with all its advance publicity, still leaves me cold. They've managed two recognisable singles and a decent video clip, but there's nothing else there to suggest a big future. Copybook pop music lacking identity. DC

DD SMASH

What a lovely lad he is. All made up just for the occasion, doing what he loves best, making people smile. The new songs, on a single hearing, sound just fine. The horns add the garnish without being overpowering, and Ian Morris is a real trouper, having also helped out Daggy and the Dickheads. Dave, have an MBE, with my compliments. DC

THE CHURCH

The world is already cursed with many humourless Englishmen pounding out dreary dirges for miserably, self-obsessed people. We don't need humourless Australians doing the same thing. The Church mesh their twin guitar sound comfortably enough, but they project all the personality of a nylon bathmat. The sixties were never as maudlin as the Church make out and they do the decade a disservice by recycling it through dark glasses. DC

SPLIT ENZ

The Enz marked their decade with almost an anti-greatest hits show. Some chestnuts from *Mental Notes* dusted off, only a couple of new ones this time, some obvious crowd-pleasers and surprise omissions including 'I Got You'. No showing from Phil Judd either ... but Robert Gillies, Paul Crowther and Mike Chunn arrived to resemble the reunion.

Simple joys done well. Trellis and toi toi stage set. Fire-eater to begin, Tim and Neil's parents spotlighted during the totally endearing

'Haul Away', the version of Proud Mary' that had us all aghast till 'One Step Ahead' emerged, calls for 'Charley' that couldn't be ignored.

The start of their new decade demands a new reason to carry on. Commercial success is theirs. Because the Enz are the Enz I don't think they'll want to stop there. ME

GNOMES OF ZURICH

As the name suggests the band isn't yer average. In fact just about the only band on the main stage that did anything erratic, unpredictable and almost lovable. Dressed in assorted costumes the Gnomes paced themselves through a well-executed, original set. A spark of life at Sweetwaters was a rare thing. ME

MONDAY

THE ROYALES

These guys seem to have an idea or two kicking around, it's just inexperience that prevents them fully developing what they've got. Bass player Alan Evans knows a bit about assembling reasonable tunes. If they can persuade their guitarist to get a haircut and stop behaving like an HM poser, they'll be on the right track. They should also dump fatuous nonsense songs like 'Kiwi Girls'. DC

MANTRA

They're billed as 'the country's only Maori heavy metal band'. Their music is a great, gross, sloppy, ponderous thing. Two giant, clammy hands trying to throttle you into submission. As pleasant as a British Army greatcoat in the Sahara and about as useful. Listening to it even without the howling gale would have been an ordeal. It was a relief when the power failed. DC

NO TAG

Battling against the elements and last-day apathy, No Tag came off pretty well. Vocalist Paul was visibly nervous, but he and the band worked hard. The boize were soon bopping down the front and the wind didn't seem so bad. How long No Tag can go on like this is doubtful, but they serve a purpose at the moment. RB

AERIAL RAILWAY



Not Really Anything are not a quiet band. They build with sound and use it in a manner at times reminiscent of the great sonic radicals, the Gordons. The Gordons' Brent McLaughlan is one of the two drummers, which insures that same pushing rhythm base. Guitarist Rex Visible is the centre-piece of the band, in a very Velvets' way. Frank Stentjees plays the kind of bass he did with the Androids and Coloured Pencils. RB

They Were Expendable - When you have three people who are very good at what they do, it's a big head start in a band. Nick Strong has long been the most interesting bassist in the Christchurch rock scene, Dave Toland the best drummer and Jay Clarkson is, well, Jay. One of this band's problems has been hauling it all together, but when they do, (and that's been happening more and more) it is truly good. Jay cuts a dark figure on stage, Patti Smith comparisons are obvious, but she's her own woman. Watch out for the mini-album. RB

Biggest and most enthusiastic crowd on Sunday turned out for Limbs dance troupe. Later in the evening Naked Spots Dance had all sorts of problems getting a decent sound out front and only really got things working for their last two or three numbers by which time a fair portion of the crowd had wandered off. Gorilla Biscuits put in a pretty useful set. A surprisingly modest crowd turned up for John Martyn's small stage show but those who came went away more than happy. Towards the end of the proceedings The Skinny Brothers knocked out a characteristically quirky bracket and the Top Scientists reunion drew a big and appreciative crowd as the hordes headed back towards the camping grounds after Split Enz had finished on the main stage. DM



UB40 hate doing festivals. Drummer James Brown (great name) says he feels it's conveyor-belt entertainment. Guitarist Robin Campbell says at nine of the last 10 festivals they've played at it's rained. A suggestion that they shouldn't play the hit 'I Think It's Going To Rain' gets a smile and a resigned nod towards the grey skies.

UB40 are a deceptive band, musically and personally. The music may be graceful reggae with tasteful saxophone but it hides lyrics of powerful bite.

Robin Campbell: "Yeah we do get away with a lot because people drift with the music and don't hear the words. I'm constantly surprised we get the airplay and TV time we do. Like some nerd London DJ said 'Food for Thought' was a beautiful religious song."

Does it worry you if your message doesn't get across?

"Well I think some people understand. Like we seem to have cornered the working class and unemployed market. We didn't set out to become a working class spokesband, but I guess those people know what we're singing about."

Deceptive personally? Well to

an ever so slight cynic, I wonder how far UB40 can go on with their lyrics without allegations of exploiting prevailing problems?

Robin Campbell replies: "I find it impossible not to write about what's going on around me. When the band started we had social problems - unemployment, Thatcher, racial tension. We've still got them. I find lots of sources of inspiration for songs in real-life."

Do you think a change in musical style to perhaps a more hard-headed approach would influence more people to your way of thinking?

"Well reggae is the style we chose to develop," says James Brown. "We feel it's a young style, just 15 years old on record. There's a lot of space there, we've got a lot to explore."

Campbell adds: "We are changing. The new album is different again. One thing we are looking at is using more dub techniques in the studio and live. Reggae is a growing influence, right round the world. It's very strong in England now and we're glad to see it diversifying to take in things like 'Pass the Dutchie', songs from singers like Gregory Issacs, right through to the harder stuff."

Have you worked with any Jamaican reggae artists?

"Not so much in the musical sense," Robin Campbell replies. "We went to see Robbie and Sly play in Paris recently. (The highlight of my life, murmurs James.)"

"What we have done though is take artists like Burning Spear and Gregory Issacs away on tour."

"We, as a band, are in a strong position to advance reggae," says Brown, "but at the same time it has a lot to teach us so we will be sticking with it."

Mark Everton



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