

Live

The Joe Jackson Band
Logan Campbell Centre,
April 24.

The second set began with a tape of Frank Sinatra discussing his recording of a Cole Porter song. This was followed by the recording itself, after which the

stage lights came up as Jackson launched into 'Breaking Us In Two'. Was this guy on some massive ego trip or what? Possibly — however, I prefer to see it as an acknowledgement of his recent sources and highest ambitions. The Cole Porter song was, after all, borrowed to name Jackson's latest album. There's nothing like aiming high — but isn't this rather a long way from *Look Sharp* power pop?

Only three years ago Joe Jackson was fronting a post-punk guitar trio and barely touching a keyboard in live performance. Now it's a six-piece band, including at least two keyboard players and not a guitar in sight. Only, marvellous bass-player Graham Maby remains from the original lineup. Even Jackson's suits have changed from tight pin-stripe to light, lounge and loose.

Along with the changes has come the man's second taste of big American success. His last two singles went Top 10; 'Steppin' Out' was even nominated for a Grammy. Not surprisingly his stage show has altered considerably. It is now longer — two hour-long sets rather than one — and far more polished. The old songs still used, particularly those from the first two albums, have all been rearranged, often radically. 'On Your Radio', for instance, opened the show with a newly acquired funk edge, (though no loss of pace). 'Is She Really Going Out With Him?', Jackson's first hit, was performed in a six voice acapella.

Yet no matter how marked the alteration, the songs were always developed, reinterpreted, not merely gimmicked up. As one who loves those early numbers I felt elated by the new versions, never once cheated.

All the more pity then that Jackson often seemed to hold us in thinly disguised contempt. Admittedly there was the usual quota of local drongos present who couldn't cope with the man's increased sophistication, yet by and large his cynical comments seemed gratuitous. (Although, credit where it's due, he did serve

a great rejoinder to one call of 'Turn it up!' by snapping back, 'Turn your fuckin' hearing aid up!')

But I suppose we should be thankful that the 'new' Joe Jackson hasn't lost any of his old fire and edge — musically or verbally — in acquiring the more up-market presentation. The band's performance even gave far more life and feeling to the recent *Night And Day* songs than they have on record. What, with that improvement and the great rearrangements of the old material, when can we expect a live album?

Peter Thomson

The Narcs
Auckland Walk
Mainstreet, May 4.

Having not seen the Narcs for a good few months, it was with a sense of anticipation I went along to Mainstreet for their national tour EP launch and, disappointing though the sight of the crowd was for a free gig, a good time was had by all.

The Narcs, now a four piece, on their night fire like a well-oiled machine gun. Unfortunately, what could have been one of those nights was marred by a muddy mix. Only on occasions could the newly acquired keyboards of Liam Ryan (Midge Marsden band) be heard and Andy Dickson's guitar could have done with a touch more level as well.

Nonetheless, the lads gave it their all. After a hesitant start, they settled into their familiar non-sense approach. Andy's vocals took on a much more confident approach and the superbly tight rhythm section of Tony Waine and Steve Clarkson held down the bottom in no uncertain fashion. When these guys lock together they're tighter than Superglue!

Their new songs sounded interesting, especially the EP's title track 'No Turning Back' and 'Not That Girl', with Tony on lead vocals. But it was the old favourites — 'First Glance', 'Over My Head', 'Stay Away', that rocked the joint out, also the moody instrumental 'The Beach', which is always a bit of a stunner. Catch

'em when they come your way, you'll come out smiling!

Auckland Walk turned in a tight, professional set of the dancy, power pop variety. Slightly bland to these ears but squeaky clean, helped by a dynamite mix — ten out of ten there!

Greg Cobb

The Circle Game
Gluepot, April 16.

A packed Gluepot testified to the success of The Circle Game better than any review could. The late arrivals had to strain on tip toes to see the action. The crowd was almost too large — it was an uncomfortable night for those who had to spend it standing up.

Richard Holden's success with The Circle Game has not been in the scripting, or the plot. Neither of those are outstanding. It has been in bringing such a great number of musicians, dancers and actors together into a show that was never boring and mostly enjoyable.

The show traces rock music through the fifties, sixties and seventies and speculates into the eighties. Of course, there were plenty of gaps, but the objective was entertainment, not some theatrical encyclopedia of rock. Musically, the best of the segments was the sixties with the Grammar Boys looking and sounding the part. The show's end was a little awkward and didn't seem to tie things up — but perhaps that was the object.

The Circle Game is apparently to come back for a return season and may even go on the road. It deserves it. It's not perfect, but it's a good night's entertainment. And that's always something to be encouraged.

Russell Brown

Naked Spots Dance
The Squirm
Rumba Bar, April 15

The Squirm — musical marble cake sliced through by impressionistic, abstract forms. You can't hum along to this, it's got free form developments of pure aural motifs and stuff. Dimension is achieved through layering of sounds.

Steve Roach on guitar and synthesisers provides the top level and the most distinct texture. Chris Burt's consistent drumming and strong rhythmic structures give depth to the density of the bass. Bassist Ramon York evokes a characteristic fairytale cavern of sound. Strategic use of tapes and Casio adds to the carefully balanced timbre of Squirm sound.

It's deliberate and powerful, from the instrumental 'Start' to 'Not Thinking', when those who could think on their feet took to the dancefloor.

Flawed this night by loudness and the absence of vocalist Fran Walsh, Naked Spots Dance are still the most original and contemporary band on the New Zealand circuit. Their seamless, sensual songs are composed of instinctive, economic, rhythmic

structures. All extraneous matter is left out. The shimmering skeletal form shifts and alters, it's sort of like listening to a mirage — if beauty is consciousness NSD is the heightened state of.

Some songs over-extended into jams, detracting from Naked Spots' ability to surprise. I liked 'Jack in the Box', 'About But Not Out' and 'Underwater Data' with guest howler Kevin Hawkins.

Beat is everything to this band and what is unheard, implicit, is as important as the notes they play.

Jewel Sanyo

Out to Lunch
Phantom Fourth
Honesty Box
Windsor Castle, May 4

Performing live for the first time were Honesty Box, the latest in the current crop of synthesiser bands. Steve Glaister and Andrew Milne played their keyboards competently enough. If they can write some more songs and improve the ones they have and encourage singer Mike Weston to improve his vocal delivery Honesty Box could be worth looking into.

The Phantom rides again! This time in the guise of an experimental outfit called Phantom Fourth, PF meandered their way through a short set of original songs. Chief Phantom Debbie Luker is the band's guitarist and shares the vocals with percussionist Lorraine Steele. When these girls sing you can't help but think of Young Marble Giants, Girls At Our Best, etc, but what's wrong with that? Ex poet Paul Luker isn't a great bass player but the drum machine keeps the songs from falling apart. Yep, more rehearsals and more variety in their material and Phantom Fourth may interest you.

Seeking fame and fortune in Auckland are Out To Lunch, who were twice as professional as the other bands but about half as original. Giving their best wasn't, unfortunately, enough as they don't appear to have anything that sets them apart from so many bands, both past and present. Some songs, like 'Deathlist' and 'Patch It Up' started off with promise but they all tended to drag on and on. Out To Lunch may find their niche but I don't think they'll find it here.

Overall the evening was interesting without being earth-shattering and in the end originality triumphed over professionalism.

Calling all garage bands — the search is on.

Alister Cain

Nocturnal Projections,
Children's Hour
Star and Garter, April 9

Nocturnal Projections — here finally is a band that is not representative of the 'ugly' alternative scene. This isn't fashion mate. It's an excoriated thrashing, a spiritual amendment. The thin, dishevelled frontman possesses a backbeat holler that howls out from the stage. 'Purgatory' was an obvious

highlight.

Visually and orally, Nocturnal Projections' use of music seems less like primitive experiment than contemporary usage. Their music becomes increasingly portentous, suggesting a constant closing in; atmosphere becomes more and more claustrophobic. It was great, really.

Children's Hour played last. What a hell of a dense sound. It's loud, it's heavy. Noise and texture pile up into a frenzied tonal assault. Little wonder these guys admire the Fall and the Birthday Party. Structure is sometimes ponderous, sometimes jerky, but always emphatic. And the rhythm section just motored like a huge and powerful creature. This bloody noise was immovable, never detracting from its purpose.

In viewing bands as diverse as Nocturnal Projections, No Tag, Children's Hour and Chills you are indeed brushing the real thing.

S.J. Townshend

Primitive Art Group
Limbs Studio, April 23

Arty farty music for listening to with your eyes closed. Over Jewel's head. Fusion jazz always was. These guys are lateral thinkers, playing off each other's skills at tangents. They are self-confident and accomplished musicians with a multiplicity of instruments and effects at their disposal.

Straining these instruments through the limits of their natural range results in some moments of torture and some of real interest. David Watson's electric guitar was skittered, bottled and bowed. David Donaldson's double bass was a constant delight. Drummer Anthony Donaldson, from cowbells to overworked cymbals was chiefly responsible for the band rattling as if it might fall apart.

Stuart Porter and Neil Duncan are virtuosos on a range of brass instruments (saxs, bass clarinet, Indian snake flutes, etc) and contrived some amazing and lovely effects. But not for long. You catch it when you can — 95 per cent spontaneous improvisation is a big random factor. I enjoyed 'Edges' and a trio piece 'Black Sheep'.

Which brings me to my story:

My music teacher was a red-faced, quick-tempered man. He took me for music for six years. I never played an instrument or read a score. I hated school and tried to pretend it wasn't happening. This man played us Mozart, Vivaldi, Beethoven, Bach. He also introduced me to Debussy, Stravinsky, Benjamin Britten, Stockhausen, Dave Brubeck, John Cage. He said I could borrow any record I wanted. I did, so as not to offend him. (I was too scared of damaging his records to play them.) He taught me to love music for life. Maybe this has nothing to do with Primitive Art Group.

Maybe it does. I am deeply suspicious of self-conscious cleverness. I think it discriminates against the ignorant.

Jewel Sanyo

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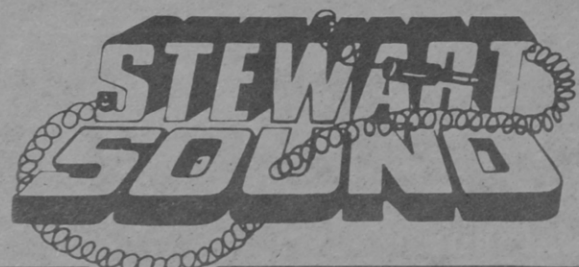


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