

Dinosaur Jr.

DA LENCH MOB, PARIS, DON JAGWAR, LIL' HALF DEAD
Whiskey A Go-Go, Los Angeles, March 15.

Wowsa, gangsta rap on the Sunset Strip. I had fantasies of a carload of hoodlums, fried on harsh PCP, cruising the strip in a lowered Impala, popping rounds off at all the rocker joints, with the bloodbath ending in a full-on, assault weapons to the fore attack on the House Of Blues. Perhaps luckily, the yuppie carnage was not to be, but there was at least a 'take no prisoners' style to some of the night's entertainment.

Support came from Don Jagwar (OK, if a little standard) and Lil' Half Dead, who had some solid moments, the funk and the rap coming off well. Then the high point of the deal, Mr Paris. His albums have always been pretty damn cool, rap with a real dark undercurrent happening. Better yet, he can do the live thing with the same style and force his records have. A lot of this probably has to do with sheer persona — Paris has the same sort of powerful demeanour as Chuck D. He stalks the stage, and where the other acts go to town on the 'are you in the house?' stuff, Paris gives it all an air of menace. His albums have always used a pretty stripped down sound, and luckily he kept that feel live. Rap can lose a lot of its impact live, but if it's kept simple and flowing, like Paris' set, it can be a real visceral thing.

Finally, Da Lench Mob hit the stage. With one member doing life, they really can claim to be gangstas, for what it's worth. Starting out looking like they would prove themselves in a purely musical sense, they blew right into a couple of tracks that sounded pretty loose and fine,

better than I'd ever heard them live (which, admittedly is only once before this night). Unfortunately this was pretty much the end of it. For some reason, the Mob decided to share the spotlight and turn the night into a huge freestyle jam, inviting most of the audience on stage. We sat through a few reasonable raps, a few bad ones, even what appeared to be some sort of horror/rap or Body Count style combo going a capella, but when we reached the lousy attempts at soul singing, it was time to leave. Gratuitous violence is one thing, but this was simply painful.

KIRK GEE

DINOSAUR JR., KING LOSER
Auckland Town Hall, March 29.

Woooooo-weeeee King Loser! These guys are showbiz personified. There hasn't been a New Zealand band in a long time that could make me stand there with a big grin, wishing I was up there with them. These guys know the shit — they're lookin' good, they make a travesty outta every rock 'n' roll band that ever was and they enjoy every moment of it. Watch with wonder as they sweep you into their cess-pit of rock — Chris' hand moves over his guitar strings furiously, to produce the bitchinest sounds, Celia takes control of the organ and bass with aplomb and glee, and drummer Tribal Thunder keeps a disdainful eye over the proceedings, while delivering mean blows. 'Good on ya Thunder,' Celia comments afterwards. Experience them now, before they surely leave us.

After King Loser, Dinosaur Jr. seemed a little inert. Last time I saw them was in 1990. Murph

was still in the band, but Lou wasn't, a blonde girl with a yo-yo was the bass player. This time they've also replaced Murph, with a drummer who wasn't quite as dynamic.

The sound was rather muffled — sometimes it was hard to tell one song from another until J started singing the melody. The mood was a fairly mellow one. J wasn't exactly giving it his all (apparently he said as much as well) — sometimes drivelling off, doing long, sloppy guitar solos and general mincing around.

Generally, the crowd was rather the same (although most of them *must* have been seeing Dinosaur Jr. for the first time), therefore the mood was unexciting. Things livened up a little when they did an unexpected rendition of 'Freak Scene' (they're still playing that?!) and their cover of the Cure's 'Just Like Heaven'. A personal treat was the 'rabbit' song from *You're Living All Over Me* and 'Repulsion', which was played as a (reluctant) encore. The rest of the set consisted of stuff off their later albums *Where You Been* and *Without A Sound* (including a painfully long version of 'You're the Only One'), which are good in the right context (ie. dropping off or in the car). With the extra long guitar whiddling, it didn't turn out to be conducive to a ruddy good rage, and I for one could have done with a seat to make it more enjoyable.

SHIRLEY CHARLES

AFRICAN HEADCHARGE
Powerstation, March 31.

Ryan should have been there for the best gig of the year — no contest. African Headcharge were heading to glory from the moment they appeared. No sing-alongs or geriatric rock stars, just a night of wild, pulsating rhythms from a band that makes every bone, muscle and nerve in your body twitch — unless you're dead. Even then, they'd have trouble keeping my coffin lid down.

The Powerstation was jammed for the first visit by an On U Sound band to these shores. African Headcharge are stalwarts of the label started by Adrian Sherwood, mixing tribal rhythms with reggae and a swath of samples. They finally made it to Aotearoa. Despite losing their engineer and a band member on the way through Customs, the sound was clear and sharp. A surprise was the apparent lack of samples used in the show. With a drummer, keyboards, guitar and three acoustic drummers, they wasted little time in settling into some intoxicating, pounding rhythms. Sharp as.

They covered most of the tracks from their latest album, *In Pursuit of Shashamane Land*,

and delved into their extensive past catalogue, but the exact song titles escape me now. It was that kind of a night, from the time when singer Bonjo I A Binghi Noah stepped into the spotlight, arms raised to an ecstatic crowd.

African Headcharge were truly awesome. When it was over, the crowd refused to move, unwilling to believe it had finished. It was that kind of a night.

MARK REVINGTON

SHORT
Bar Bodega, April 7.

While not fitting into the cliched idea of a Wellington band (acid jazz combos of funk-metal), Short are quickly becoming something of an institution in the capital.

What better place to see the band than at that institution of a venue, Bar Bodega, and after Short's recent Dinosaur Jr. support slot, the place was packed.

Instrumentally, Short comprise of drums, guitar and two bass players, one of which is armed with cello strings (what was that about quirky jazz combos). This caused a stir of interest before the band actually started playing anything, then it became apparent the beefed up bass didn't add a great deal to the overall sound of the band.

The songs followed a pattern of musical rises and falls. In almost every song, the full-on distorted guitar thrash would cut out leaving the rhythm naked for several seconds. This built up towards the re-entry of guitars, and the return of the whole sound, for the chorus. At first this effect worked well in creating a collective buzz of anticipation around the room (like thunder-claps before the lightening), but after several repeats of the same technique it all became too predictable. Instead of standing stock-still, waiting for the sound to hit, many took the opportunity of a few seconds of relative quiet to order another beer.

The overall pleasure of Short was not in the listening, but in the watching. Stu Brown bounces around in a wee world of his own, but just so happy to be there. Cliff Bateman lost himself in his own playing, shying away to the back of the stage except for the odd bout of leaping in unison, which Short did so well. They looked rapt to be there, apart from Brett Garrety who appeared slightly cautious on stage (who wouldn't, with the constant threat of having one of Brown's tuning pegs catching you in the eye?), and his vocals (including choruses) got completely lost in the overall mix, which probably didn't over joy him.

I want to hear more of Short. This gig didn't

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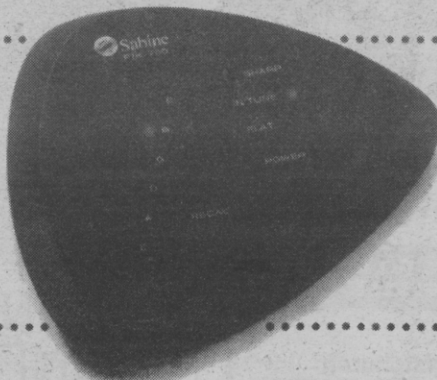
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